



# Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



THURSDAY — 6 JAN 2022

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## Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/05 Mail delivery delays western Washington
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/mail-delays-usps-western-washington-weather/281-f3a3e20b-c82a-4767-947e-f69a06431db3">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/mail-delays-usps-western-washington-weather/281-f3a3e20b-c82a-4767-947e-f69a06431db3</a>
GIST	<p>ISSAQUAH, Wash. — The ongoing snow and ice in western Washington has caused some neighborhoods to miss out on mail delivery for a couple of weeks.</p> <p>Viewers in cities like Snohomish, Gig Harbor and Issaquah have reached out to KING 5 News about not receiving their mail after viewing our story about <a href="#">mail delivery issues in Covington</a>.</p> <p>Shannon Henderson hasn't received any mail at her Issaquah home since Christmas Eve. She is waiting on something more important than coupons or late Christmas cards.</p> <p>"My husband needed some medications and his ran out today. It was coming in the mail and supposed to be coming on the 27th of December," explained Henderson.</p> <p>She said she receives email notifications about which pieces of mail are supposed to be delivered to her home. Henderson received the email about the medication but the medicine was never delivered.</p> <p>Henderson said one of her neighbors are also experiencing similar issues.</p> <p>"One of my neighbors said she called this morning to the post office down in Issaquah and, due to covid, there are lots of staff down at the post office that are not there so they're very short-staffed," she said. "If she were to come down and ask for her mail, they've just got boxes and they don't have enough people to go through everything to find it."</p> <p>In a statement to KING 5, the postal service said the holiday weekend, COVID-19 personnel impacts and winter weather all contributed to the delays:</p> <p><i>"The U.S. Postal Service is hard at work to maintain consistent delivery during this unusual pattern of weather throughout western Washington State and elsewhere. Loss of power, road closures and transportation availability have all been challenges these last few days. We're flexing our resources in response to these weather issues as well as local COVID 19 personnel impacts.</i></p> <p><i>The following post offices have resumed all operations – Hoodspport, Lilliwaup, Carson, Appleton, Klickitat, Glenwood and Marblemount. Additionally, mail for Covington is expected to be current, effective today.</i></p> <p><i>As a reminder, Jan 1 was a federal holiday and thus there was no mail delivery over the weekend."</i></p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Mason Co. state of emergency
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/weather/mason-county-state-of-emergency/281-8de36255-6d08-4794-9279-a6c65d34944b">https://www.king5.com/article/weather/mason-county-state-of-emergency/281-8de36255-6d08-4794-9279-a6c65d34944b</a>
GIST	<p>MASON COUNTY, Wash. — The Mason County Board of Commissioners declared a state of emergency Wednesday following "extensive damage" from last week's snowstorm and just <a href="#">ahead of forecasted heavy rain</a> that could bring further destruction to the county.</p> <p>The emergency declaration allows the county to mobilize resources to help the community, activate emergency resources, contract with outside agencies, incur debts and also allows departments to forgo certain procedures and formalities in their extreme weather response.</p>

	<p>Over the next 24 hours, there's a greater potential for roofs to collapse under the weight of heavy snow and falling rain forecast to fall after midnight, according to the Hoodspport Fire Department.</p> <p>Roofs collapsed on four structures due to heavy snow so far, according to Chief Ryan Spurling with the Mason County Sheriff's Department.</p> <p>Others have been removed from homes that are in danger of collapsing, according to Fire Chief Michael Sexton with the Lake Cushman Fire Department.</p> <p>There are no reported injuries. Those who have been displaced are staying at the fire station for the night. The Red Cross is helping to coordinate shelter.</p> <p>Dozens of people who live in subdivisions around Lake Cushman are <a href="#">trapped in their neighborhoods</a> due to extensive snowfall, downed trees and power lines.</p> <p>The emergency declaration also cited extensive damage to county infrastructure, roads, bridges, private roads, homes, businesses and farmlands.</p> <p>Nearly 50 miles of US 101 between Hoodspport and State Route 104 in Jefferson County remains closed as the Washington State Department of Transportation attempts to repair powerlines and remove debris from the highway following heavy snow.</p> <p>Although just five miles of the roadway are impassable, terrain, winter conditions and lack of available space for vehicles to turn around require the department to close down the whole stretch of road.</p> <p>Those who notice their homes starting to show signs of collapse are asked to collect their warm clothes, medications or special medical equipment, wallets and purses, evacuate the home and call 911.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Disaster declaration historic Nov. flooding</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/president-biden-issues-major-disaster-declaration-for-historic-november-floods">https://www.q13fox.com/news/president-biden-issues-major-disaster-declaration-for-historic-november-floods</a>
GIST	<p><b>WASHINGTON</b> - President Joe Biden has announced a <a href="#">major disaster declaration</a> for the state of Washington in response to the <a href="#">historic flooding</a> that occurred in November.</p> <p>The major disaster declaration allows for federal funding for individuals, businesses and tribes <a href="#">affected by the flooding</a>.</p> <p>Those in <a href="#">Clallam</a>, <a href="#">Skagit</a>, and <a href="#">Whatcom</a> Counties and the Lummi Nation, Nooksack Indian Tribe, and Quileute Tribe will be eligible for the federal funds.</p> <p>"Assistance can include grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses, and other programs to help individuals and business owners recover from the effects of the disaster," the White House said in a news release.</p> <p>Additional designations may be made at a later date if requested by the state and warranted by the results of further damage assessments.</p> <p>Residents and business owners who sustained losses in the impacted counties can begin <a href="#">applying for assistance by registering online</a> or by calling 1-800-621-FEMA (3362).</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Pierce Co. test site closes; too high demand</b>
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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/lakewood-covid-testing-site-to-close-permanently-citing-high-demand-and-not-enough-space">https://www.q13fox.com/news/lakewood-covid-testing-site-to-close-permanently-citing-high-demand-and-not-enough-space</a>
GIST	<p><b>LAKEWOOD, Wash.</b> - <a href="#">Pierce County</a> is closing its Lakewood COVID-19 testing cite due to extremely high demand.</p> <p>Officials say the location simply is not suitable for the high volume of testing, as well as safety concerns with the huge traffic backups stretching back several blocks. The site will permanently close after the end of the day Wednesday.</p> <p>The county's <a href="#">temporary testing site</a> at the Washington State Fair in <a href="#">Puyallup</a> remains open through the week.</p> <p>In the meantime, the county is looking at other sites that can handle larger crowds before they open another testing site.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Cruise lines cancel sailings; omicron surge</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/business/norwegian-cruise-cancels-several-sailings-omicron-cases-surge-2022-01-05/">https://www.reuters.com/business/norwegian-cruise-cancels-several-sailings-omicron-cases-surge-2022-01-05/</a>
GIST	<p>Jan 5 (Reuters) - Royal Caribbean and Norwegian Cruise Line on Wednesday canceled sailings amid rising fears of Omicron-related coronavirus infections that have dampened the nascent recovery of the pandemic-ravaged cruise industry.</p> <p>Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd (RCL.N) called off its Spectrum of the Seas cruise for Jan. 6 after nine guests on its Jan. 2 trip were identified as close contacts to a local Hong Kong COVID-19 case. read more</p> <p>The contacts have tested negative but the cruise ship will return to Kai Tak Cruise Terminal in Hong Kong on Jan. 5 to test all guests and crew who must take a second test on Jan. 8, the company said.</p> <p>A similar decision to cancel trips by Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings Ltd (NCLH.N) was made against the backdrop of the United States reporting the highest daily tally of any country for new coronavirus infections on Monday. read more</p> <p>"Due to ongoing travel restrictions, we've had to modify a few sailings and unfortunately have had to cancel," the 17-ship strong cruise operator said, with the embarkation dates for a few canceled sailings as far out as late April.</p> <p>The cruise line, which requires everyone on board to be vaccinated, has also had to cut short a 12-day round trip from Miami on its Norwegian Pearl ship, citing "COVID related circumstances."</p> <p>The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had last week advised people to avoid cruise travel after launching investigations into onboard cases on more than 90 ships. The health agency starts a scrutiny if at least 0.1% of the guests test positive. read more</p> <p>Norwegian Cruise said guests, who were supposed to embark on the canceled sailings on the eight ships, will receive full refunds and bonus credits for future bookings.</p> <p>The Omicron-led travel uncertainty is also causing guests on other sailings to cancel their bookings as a few ships have also had to skip ports due to onboard infections.</p> <p>"We booked the cruise last March and assumed that things would be getting back to normal... by mid-December, I was mentally prepared for a change of plans," said Holly Bromley, a consulting arborist, who canceled her booking on Norwegian Epic.</p>

	Meanwhile, bigger rival Carnival Corp (CCL.N) said it has not canceled any upcoming voyages, but its shares fell on Wednesday to close down 2.6%. Royal Caribbean lost 2.1% and Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings 3.6%.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Australia, Japan sign defense pact</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/china-japan-asia-australia-scott-morrison-4fec98d23bb6cf16350e6d093ff147fc">https://apnews.com/article/china-japan-asia-australia-scott-morrison-4fec98d23bb6cf16350e6d093ff147fc</a>
GIST	<p>SYDNEY (AP) — The leaders of Japan and Australia signed a “landmark” defense agreement Thursday that allows closer cooperation between their militaries and stands as a rebuke to China’s growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region.</p> <p>Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida met in a virtual summit to sign the Reciprocal Access Agreement, the first such defense pact signed by Japan with any country other than the United States.</p> <p>The agreement follows more than a year of talks between Japan and Australia aimed at breaking down legal barriers to allow the troops of one country to enter the other for training and other purposes.</p> <p>“Japan is our closest partner in Asia as demonstrated by our special strategic partnership — Australia’s only such partnership,” Morrison said. “An equal partnership, shared trust between two great democracies committed to the rule of law, human rights, free trade and a free and open Indo-Pacific.”</p> <p>Kishida hailed the agreement as “a landmark instrument which will elevate security cooperation between the nations to new heights.”</p> <p>While China wasn’t mentioned, its significance at the signing was implicit.</p> <p>Japan’s ambassador to Australia, Shingo Yamagami, said that “in light of the deteriorating security environment, what Japan and Australia can do together is first of all to increase deterrence.”</p> <p>Morrison said the agreement “will form an important part of Australia and Japan’s response to the uncertainty we now face and will underpin greater and more complex engagement in operability between the Australia Defense Force and Japan Self-Defense Forces.”</p> <p>He called the pact a “pivotal moment for Australia and Japan and (for) the security of our two nations and our people.”</p> <p>Malcolm Davis, a senior analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, said the agreement recognized the importance of establishing firm defense partnerships to deter an increasingly aggressive China.</p> <p>“Japan is breaking away from its post-war constitutional constraints on the use of military force because Tokyo recognizes the challenges it is facing from China,” he told Sky News. “There is a territorial dispute between China and Japan ... and more significantly there is a growing concern China will make a move over Taiwan in the next few years.”</p> <p>The pact builds on the strategic dialogue known as “the Quad,” which includes Japan, Australia, the United States and India. Australia last year also signed the Aukus agreement with the United States and Britain, both of which have pledged to help Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Spike in Calif. cases hit hospitals, schools</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-education-california-8b3e0598c71fb86e5912cbe47fed8518">https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-education-california-8b3e0598c71fb86e5912cbe47fed8518</a>

## GIST

LOS ANGELES (AP) — California is struggling to staff hospitals and classrooms as an astonishing spike in coronavirus infections sweeps through the state.

The fast-spreading omicron variant of COVID-19 is sidelining exposed or infected health care workers even as hospital beds fill with patients and “some facilities are going to be strapped,” Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly said Wednesday.

Some 40% of hospitals are expecting to face critical staff shortages and some are reporting as much as one quarter of their staff out for virus-related reasons, said Kiyomi Burchill of the California Hospital Association.

In Fresno County, more than 300 workers at area hospitals were either isolating because of exposure or recovering, said Dan Lynch, the county’s emergency medical services director.

The Los Angeles County Fire Department is driving patients to hospitals in fire trucks rather than ambulances because 450 firefighters are absent after testing positive, acting Assistant Chief Brian Bennett told the Carson City Council on Tuesday, according the Los Angeles Daily News.

Going forward, the county Fire Department will only be sent on medical calls when absolutely necessary, officials said.

“The rapid spread of omicron has wiped out our workforce,” McCormick Ambulance, a private company that contracts with the county, said in a statement.

California had the lowest per-capita case rate in the U.S. in September but like the rest of the country it’s now experiencing a dramatic rise from the omicron variant. Confirmed virus cases have shot up nearly 500% in the last two weeks and hospitalizations have doubled since Christmas to more than 8,000. State models forecast hospitalizations could top 20,000 by early next month, a level nearly as high as last January, when California experienced its deadliest surge.

At least nine hospitals in Orange County have set up surge tents to increase their capacity if they are swamped by virus cases in addition to a rise in other medical problems, such as strokes, said Dr. Regina Chinsio-Kwong, the county’s deputy health director.

People with minor symptoms should start with a virtual visit to a doctor because “our hospitals and our ERs and our urgent cares are full and they really need to focus their efforts on people who are really sick,” she said.

California has extended its indoor mask mandate into mid-February to help combat the infection but Ghaly said there is no discussion of further restrictions, noting the availability of vaccines and COVID-19 treatments that were largely absent a year ago.

The virus is sidelining school personnel even as 6 million K-12 students are returning to classrooms.

Sacramento City Unified School District reported that more than 500 students and staff were quarantined after testing positive for COVID-19.

Gov. Gavin Newsom and state officials, meanwhile, are facing criticism for failing to deliver on a promise to provide rapid, at-home tests to all California students and school staff before classrooms reopened after the winter break.

Millions of test kits were sent to families but millions more were not, and there have been long lines this week at Los Angeles County testing sites.

California schools chief Tony Thurmond on Wednesday called the delay “disappointing.”

	Ghaly said logistical problems and bad weather in Southern California had contributed to the problem but said some 6.2 million tests had been delivered to county offices of education, with more tests going out this week.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Covid is changing democracies</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220106-health-first-freedom-second-how-covid-is-changing-democracies">https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220106-health-first-freedom-second-how-covid-is-changing-democracies</a>
GIST	<p>Paris (AFP) – From a litany of lockdowns to mandatory mask-wearing and Covid passes to access entertainment and sporting venues, the pandemic has led to sweeping restrictions on civil liberties in some of the world's oldest democracies.</p> <p>Among Western countries, European nations particularly have been quick to crimp basic freedoms in the name of fighting the virus.</p> <p>French President Emmanuel Macron caused a furore this week by saying he wanted to "piss off" those who refuse to get vaccinated by "limiting as much as possible their access to activities in social life".</p> <p>The remarks from the leader of a country that sees itself as a global beacon of liberty underscore the extent to which the pandemic has changed national priorities.</p> <p>The United States has also taken aggressive steps, including closing its borders to most of the world for 20 months and making vaccinations mandatory for all federal employees and staff of big companies.</p> <p>The Berlin-based rights watchdog Civil Liberties Union for Europe warned in a report last year that measures targeting the unvaccinated could "exacerbate existing inequalities".</p> <p>"(They) may create a two-tier society where some people may enjoy an extensive set of freedoms and rights while others are excluded," the report said.</p> <p>Persecution or protection?</p> <p>At the start of the pandemic, governments used sweeping lockdowns and curfews to try to contain the virus.</p> <p>But in the past year, most countries began refining their strategies, rolling out digital passes allowing people to show they are vaccinated.</p> <p>Faced with the Omicron variant, some governments, notably Austria and the Netherlands, reverted to one-size-fits-all tactics and ordered people back indoors during the end-of-year celebrations.</p> <p>But worldwide, many countries are now turning the screws on citizens who are refusing to be jabbed.</p> <p>Austria kept the unvaccinated confined to their homes last month after lifting a partial lockdown. In February, the country will be the first in Europe to make vaccines compulsory for most people.</p> <p>British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says his country also needs to have a "national conversation" about mandatory vaccinations, echoing similar comments from the German government.</p> <p>The French government meanwhile has proposed to follow Germany's lead by barring the unvaccinated from restaurants, cinemas and leisure facilities.</p> <p>While public acceptance of Covid restrictions was high at the outset of the crisis, pandemic fatigue is fuelling growing resistance to new curbs.</p>



The unvaccinated complain of discrimination, with some going so far as to compare their treatment to the persecution of European Jews during World War II.

And from the Netherlands to Austria, Germany, Belgium and France, thousands of people have taken to the streets -- sometimes clashing with police -- to protest Covid rules and health passes.

'Libertarian zealots'

The grievances are being exploited by parties on the far-right, far-left and those opposed to interventionist policies.

In Germany, the pro-business Free Democrats made strong gains in September's general election after campaigning against strict lockdowns.

In France, which will hold presidential elections in April, far-right candidates Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour have come out swinging against Macron's proposed vaccine pass.

"Coronavirus restrictions are necessary; but concerns about how they are framed and imposed are not and should not be the preserve of libertarian zealots and Covid deniers," Britain's Guardian newspaper warned in March 2021.

For the most part, Europe has avoided upheaval by maintaining a balance between the need to protect public health and defend civil liberties.

Raul Magni-Berton, a French political scientist who studied the Covid restrictions imposed in around 40 European countries, cited France and eastern European countries as having the strictest curbs.

His study showed that the countries with the greatest respect for individual freedoms were the oldest continuous democracies, such as Britain or Switzerland.

His research also concluded that restrictions tend to be lighter in countries with coalition governments like the Netherlands or where power is shared between the central government and regions like federal Germany.

"How many people are you forced to negotiate with? That's the question," Magni-Berton said.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 L.A. area: surge sick police, firefighters</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://ktla.com/news/local-news/more-than-1000-l-a-area-police-officers-firefighters-paramedics-home-sick-or-quarantining-due-to-covid/">https://ktla.com/news/local-news/more-than-1000-l-a-area-police-officers-firefighters-paramedics-home-sick-or-quarantining-due-to-covid/</a>
GIST	<p>More than 1,000 police officers, firefighters and paramedics in the Los Angeles region were ill or at home quarantining on Tuesday after testing positive for the coronavirus, spurring additional concerns about public safety as the Omicron variant continues its rapid spread.</p> <p>A spokesman for L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti called it an “unprecedented surge” in cases which the mayor is focused on and working to mitigate — including by authorizing additional overtime funds to cover the shifts of those out sick.</p> <p>More than 500 employees of the Los Angeles Police Department — including 416 sworn officers — were at home quarantining as of Jan. 1 after positive tests, the department said. In the last week alone, the department had seen 424 new cases, officials said.</p> <p>The Los Angeles Fire Department had 201 employees out due to the coronavirus as of Tuesday, while the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department had 552 employees out, including 389 sworn deputies, officials said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/06 Omicron threatens economic recovery
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/mounting-omicron-infections-force-businesses-to-scramble-threatening-economic-recovery/ar-AASuE0J">https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/mounting-omicron-infections-force-businesses-to-scramble-threatening-economic-recovery/ar-AASuE0J</a>
GIST	<p>The omicron coronavirus variant is slowing the economic recovery, making worker shortages for already-shorthanded employers more severe and leading consumers to pull back from spending on restaurants, hotels and airlines that have been battered by two years of pandemic upheaval.</p> <p>Since it was first detected in southern Africa late last year, the highly contagious coronavirus variant has sparked restrictions on business activity in several countries.</p> <p>In the United States, major airlines this week canceled thousands of flights, while public transit systems in New York and Washington curtailed service because of staffing shortages. Professional sports schedules were upended and corporations such as American Express, Goldman Sachs and The Washington Post have shelved their January return-to-office plans.</p> <p>David Nayfeld, co-owner of Che Fico, an Italian taverna in San Francisco, said he spent more than \$5,000 on rapid coronavirus tests in December before opting to temporarily close for the last two weeks of the year. This week, he's struggling to reopen even as he fears that fresh waves of infections will render his efforts futile.</p> <p>"We lost our highest revenue-driving months of the year, which means our highest profit-driving months, and every day we are getting reports that two or three of our staff is getting infected with omicron," said Nayfeld, who said nearly a dozen of his 70 employees are currently ill.</p> <p>Omicron's fallout, which is likely to worsen before it eases, shows that the recovery remains vulnerable to the coronavirus's unpredictable trajectory. The growing toll of sick workers — Capital Economics says more than 5 million Americans are in quarantine — is hammering employers that already were struggling to secure enough labor. Yet even as pandemic fatigue deepens, there are hopes that omicron will prove to be a punishing but short-lived squall.</p> <p>"At first, it was a lot of fear of the unknown," said Dean Burrows, chief executive of Gear Motions, a Syracuse, N.Y.-based manufacturer. "Over two years later, our employees are more educated. We're more knowledgeable as a country. Now we kind of understand what it is. ... We know how to manage it."</p> <p>Omicron so far has made little impression upon financial markets, which are focused on the Federal Reserve's planned credit tightening and the ebbing of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan. Since late November, when the South African government reported the new variant to the World Health Organization, the Dow Jones industrial average has risen at an annualized 15 percent rate. The yield on the benchmark 10-year treasury security, which would be expected to rise if investors anticipated a recession, has moved little.</p> <p>"The mood in the market is that it's not going to be that big a deal economically," said Jim O'Sullivan, chief U.S. macro strategist for TD Securities. "The hope is it'll be over in a month."</p> <p>After being sideswiped last summer by the delta variant of the coronavirus, the economy roared back to grow at an annual rate of more than 7 percent in the last three months of the year, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta's estimate.</p> <p>Now, many Wall Street economists are trimming their projections for the first months of this year. O'Sullivan reduced his first-quarter growth forecast to 2 percent from 3 percent but expects the economy to make up the lost ground in the next three months.</p> <p>The emergence of the new variant comes at a time of unprecedented labor market churn. A record 4.5 million Americans quit or changed their jobs in November, the Labor Department said earlier this week. An unprecedented spike in the number of workers who are employed but unable to work because of illness</p>

could distort the government's January employment data, which would exclude any unpaid workers in quarantine, economist Andrew Hunter of Capital Economics wrote in a note to clients on Wednesday.

Omicron is testing Federal Reserve Board Chair Jerome H. Powell's assertion last summer that Americans have "learned to live with" the coronavirus. Companies have developed new ways of operating amid the risks posed by a global pandemic, while vaccinations have made government shutdowns less likely, Powell said in July.

At the Horton Hotel in Boone, N.C., a university town about 100 miles northwest of Charlotte, managers try to respond to a constantly shifting landscape. The luxury property housed in a 98-year-old building boasts two bars, including an open-air rooftop venue that hosts the local New Year's Eve ball drop.

With omicron threatening, the hotel limited attendance to 15 to 20 percent of capacity and sent non-guests home at 11 p.m., said Adam Zembruski, program director for Hospiamo, an adviser to the Horton's owners.

So far, four out of the hotel's roughly 25 workers have tested positive for the coronavirus, and managers are eyeing additional restrictions if needed.

"It's an everyday conversation. We could close the bars. We talked about that just last night," he said earlier this week.

While the virus poses an acute problem for businesses that deal with the public, manufacturers also are crafting new strategies to keep their machines turning.

Business is good at J.V. Manufacturing, a die and component maker in Natrona Heights, Pa. As orders flooded in over the past year, the company added about 40 new employees, taking its payroll to 137 workers.

From the start of the pandemic to Nov. 1, just six workers tested positive for the coronavirus, according to Melissa Vecchi, the company's executive director. Then, 37 people came down with the virus in November alone. In the past several days, after the holidays, there's been a fresh outbreak of 11 cases.

Now the company is considering an increased push for robotics and digitization to make production less vulnerable to missing workers, she said.

"I definitely think it's here to stay," she said of the virus. "It's just about finding a way to balance it, finding what risks are worth taking and what risks aren't worth taking."

Some institutions face special staffing challenges. In the pandemic's initial waves, medical professionals surged to geographic hot spots, relieving overwhelmed local caregivers. But with the omicron variant erupting in every region, individual hospitals and clinics are on their own, according to J. Stephen Jones, chief executive of Inova, the Northern Virginia health-care system.

"There aren't more people to come to help right now," he said.

Inova has 388 staff members out sick because of covid-19, though with milder symptoms than during earlier waves, Jones said. That's down from the system's highest number of absences (444 on Dec. 31) since coronavirus vaccines became available.

Elsewhere, executives worry about a possible resurgence of global supply chain bottlenecks triggered by harsh coronavirus clampdowns in China, where the government maintains a "zero-covid" policy.

Truck traffic serving several warehouses at the Ningbo port, one of China's largest cargo gateways, was suspended earlier this week after "a few people" tested positive for the virus, according to a statement from the shipping line Maersk.

“The greatest risk to the U.S. economy is how non-U.S. governments choose to respond to it,” said Frances Donald, global chief economist and strategist for Manulife Investment Management.

Suppliers are a preoccupation for Habco, a maker of aerospace test and support equipment in Glastonbury, Conn. Chief executive Brian Montanari said he believes the company was the first in the nation to begin on-site coronavirus testing of workers, on April 9, 2020.

The company purchased scores of masks, gloves and hand sanitizer, and spread its workers across two shifts in a bid to avoid infections. Later, it added air-quality monitors and filtration devices to meet a shifting threat.

As a result, Habco went months before seeing its first worker test positive and had only a handful idled before omicron appeared. In the past few weeks, more employees tested positive as the variant ran wild in Connecticut.

“We’re doing everything we can to protect our employees,” he said. “My concern is more what I can’t control.”

Habco’s production depends upon a number of local parts suppliers. If just one or two of their workers are taken ill, it might paralyze their production of critical components, he said.

Another factor beyond Montanari’s control is the response of local schools to the new variant. Nationwide, at least 4,561 schools closed for at least part of this week because of the pandemic, easily a record for the current school year, according to Burbio, which tracks school closures.

Throughout the pandemic, Habco gave employees plenty of time to deal with family responsibilities. But as the virus appears to be evolving into a less lethal form, Montanari wonders how long that stance can be sustained.

“We’ve got a business to run,” he said. “I’ve got customers who need product and they don’t care about my employees’ child-care problems.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 America calls out sick</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/06/economy/business-jobs-workers-omicron/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/06/economy/business-jobs-workers-omicron/index.html</a>
GIST	<p><b>New York (CNN Business)</b>Montclair Bread Co. closed last weekend after a quarter of the staff tested positive for Covid-19. The bakery missed out on 25% of its monthly sales.</p> <p>"We're basically open during the week to prep for the weekend," said Rachel Wyman, the owner of the artisan bread, specialty doughnut and treat <a href="#">shop</a> in Montclair, New Jersey. The 10-year-old bakery stayed open throughout the pandemic because it was considered an essential business. "I can't remember the last time I made the decision to close on a weekend," Wyman added.</p> <p>Without enough bakers to operate, she didn't have a choice. She made the decision Thursday to close down for a week to give the whole staff time to "get tested and come back healthy hopefully."</p> <p>Wyman is paying her employees for the week off. But it's coming out of her budget, so she's late on paying rent for her home.</p> <p>Although she hopes to open this weekend, the plan is fluid. She found out Wednesday that two more employees tested positive.</p>

The latest coronavirus [surge](#) in the United States, driven by the Omicron variant, has disrupted businesses. It has also stretched their employees, who were already worn down from nearly two years of taxing work throughout the pandemic and a historic labor shortage.

As America comes down with Covid-19 again, stores, restaurants, airlines and other industries have few other options but to serve customers less — or not at all. Apple last week [closed all of its stores](#) in New York City to customer browsing, while Macy's said it would shorten its morning and evening hours Monday through Thursday for all of this month.

Some workers are coming down sick while others are calling out because their child care plans are in flux with some [schools closing down](#). Some employees are staying home, fearful about catching the virus on the job.

On Wednesday, six employees at a Starbucks in Buffalo that recently voted to join a union [walked out](#), citing health concerns. The walkout prompted the store to close temporarily.

### **Omicron adds to staffing woes**

The growing number of sick workers adds to the pressures that businesses face [holding onto staff and filling vacancies](#), as well as their demands on their current staff, who are forced to pick up extra responsibilities or shifts.

The surge has triggered "widespread cancellations and closures, as already short-staffed businesses are hit with a wave of staff calling in sick," Michael Pearce, senior US economist at Capital Economics, said in an email to clients Wednesday.

Several recent data points, which do not yet factor in the arrival of the Omicron variant, highlight the historically tight US labor market.

A record 4.5 million Americans voluntarily left their jobs in November, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics [data](#) released Tuesday. This pushed the quits rate to 3%, matching the high from September.

"Workers continued to quit their jobs at a historic rate. The low-wage sectors directly impacted by the pandemic continued to be the source of much of the elevated quitting," Nick Bunker, director of research at the Indeed Hiring Lab, said in emailed comments Tuesday.

Employers also had 10.6 million jobs to fill in November, a slight decline compared with just over 11 million job openings in October.

Small business owners, in particular, continue to struggle to find workers: 48% of all small business owners reported they had job openings they could not fill in November, down one point from October, according to a National Federation of Independent Business [survey](#) conducted last month.

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HEADLINE	01/06 China lashes out US over Lithuania
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/china-lashes-us-support-lithuania-82106486">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/china-lashes-us-support-lithuania-82106486</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- China lashed out at the United States on Thursday over its support for the European nation of Lithuania in its feud with Beijing over relations with Taiwan.</p> <p>Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Washington was using the Baltic state to “use Taiwan to contain China.”</p> <p>“The U.S. side has defended Lithuania’s erroneous act of creating ‘one China, one Taiwan,’ and attempted to put together a small clique condoning the Taiwan independence forces,” Wang said at a daily briefing.</p>

His remarks came after the top U.S. and German diplomats on Wednesday said Chinese pressure against Lithuania was unwarranted.

Lithuania broke with diplomatic custom last year by letting the Taiwanese office in Vilnius bear the name Taiwan, instead of Chinese Taipei, which most other countries use to avoid offending Beijing.

China considers Taiwan part of its territory with no right to diplomatic recognition, and Lithuania's move infuriated Beijing, which withdrew its ambassador to Vilnius and expelled the Lithuanian ambassador to Beijing. Lithuania has since closed its embassy in Beijing.

Constant Chinese pressure has reduced the number of Taiwan's formal diplomatic allies to just 14, although it has robust informal relations with the U.S., Germany and most other major nations.

Lithuania, a country of 2.8 million people, is a member of the European Union and NATO and a close U.S. ally.

Wang also blasted Taiwan's move to create a \$200 million investment fund for Lithuania to offset China's economic reprisals as "dollar diplomacy," adding that "soliciting foreign support to Taiwan independence will only lead to a dead end."

Taiwan's office, a de facto embassy, opened in November, and Lithuania is planning to open its own trade office in Taiwan later this year.

Taiwan said it is ready to help Lithuania in resupplying trade, with the island saying goods are stopped from entering China.

"There are more than 120 sea containers — at least 1.5 million euro worth — blocked by Beijing. We're ready to take all of those and help Lithuanian companies," Huang said.

In his remarks after a meeting with his German counterpart, Annalena Baerbock, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, "We have immediate concern about the government of China's attempts to bully Lithuania."

Blinken said China has been pushing European and American companies to stop building products with components made in Lithuania or risk losing access to the Chinese market.

Baerbock said "we as Europeans stand in solidarity at Lithuania's side."

China's Foreign Ministry has not directly confirmed its trade ban on Lithuania or other forms of retaliation, but said that Vilnius had crossed a "red line."

China's ruling Communist Party has vast powers to pressure Chinese companies that don't hew to the government's political and diplomatic agenda.

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HEADLINE	01/05 SKorea apologizes for border crossing
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/korea-military-apologizes-defectors-border-crossing-82084066">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/korea-military-apologizes-defectors-border-crossing-82084066</a>
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea -- South Korea's military apologized Wednesday for causing public concern about its security readiness, days after it failed to stop a suspected North Korean defector who crossed the heavily fortified border to return to the North.</p> <p>The Joint Chiefs of Staff said South Korean surveillance cameras detected the person scaling a barbed-wire fence at the border on Saturday, triggering alarms and prompting a team of six soldiers to move to the area.</p>

But the troops failed to find any trace of the person, Lt. Gen. Jeon Dong-jin, director of operations at the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told lawmakers. He said officials checked the recorded video from the surveillance cameras but were unable to find the person immediately because the time in the video was incorrectly set.

A thermal observation device later spotted the person again, but officers initially thought it was a North Korean trying to defect to South Korea, rather than one returning to the North. The officers later revised their assessment and again dispatched troops, who failed to catch the person before he or she entered North Korean territory, Jeon said.

Jeon said the military will boost the readiness of front-line troops and upgrade surveillance systems along the border.

"I am really sorry for causing concerns to the people because of this incident," the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Won In-choul, told the lawmakers. "I promise to make every effort so there is no recurrence of similar incidents."

President Moon Jae-in called the incident a "grave" failure in surveillance that the military must not repeat. He ordered a special inspection of the military's overall security posture, according to his spokesperson, Park Kyung-mee.

The Defense Ministry said the person who crossed the border is likely a defector who had walked across the frontier in the other direction in late 2020 to settle in South Korea. Ministry officials said the appearance of the person in the security video matches that defector.

After arriving in South Korea, the defector identified himself as a former gymnast and said he crawled over border fences before being found by South Korean troops, ministry officials said.

Defecting via the 248-kilometer (155-mile) -long, 4-kilometer (2.5-mile) -wide border, known as the Demilitarized Zone, is rare since it is guarded by land mines, tank traps and combat troops on both sides in addition to barbed-wire fences. South Korea's military has come under massive public criticism whenever someone is able to cross the border undetected.

The fate of the person who crossed into North Korea on Saturday is unknown. The Defense Ministry said North Korea hasn't responded to its request that the person's safety be assured.

While in South Korea, the defector struggled to adjust to his new life, complained to people around him and told them about his desire to return to North Korea, said Ahn Chan-il, a defector-turned-scholar in Seoul.

Ahn, citing unidentified friends of the man, said he worked for a small janitorial service but was bullied by colleagues and lived alone at a government-provided apartment in Seoul. He said the defector had fled to South Korea after suffering abuses from his stepfather in North Korea.

About 34,000 North Koreans have fled to South Korea in search of better lives since the late 1990s, and about 30 have returned home in the past 10 years, according to South Korean government records.

Observers say the returnees likely suffered cultural shock and discrimination, had large debts or were blackmailed by North Korean agents who threatened to harm their loved ones if they didn't return.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Every US cruise w/passengers has Covid
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2022/01/05/every-cruise-ship-covid-cdc/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2022/01/05/every-cruise-ship-covid-cdc/</a>
GIST	<a href="#">Coronavirus</a> cases have been <a href="#">reported</a> on every cruise ship sailing with passengers in U.S. waters.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, all 92 ships with passengers have met the threshold for investigation by the public health agency. In every case, the CDC has either started an investigation or has investigated and continues to observe the ship.

The number of ships under investigation had grown sharply in recent days, but it wasn't until Tuesday's update, using data submitted by cruise lines Monday, that every ship reached that level.

Last week, the CDC [warned](#) all travelers, including those who are vaccinated, to avoid cruise ships. The advice came after the agency said the number of cases skyrocketed from 162 in the first two weeks of December to 5,013 between Dec. 15 and 29.

"The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads easily between people in close quarters on board ships, and the chance of getting COVID-19 on cruise ships is very high, even if you are fully vaccinated and have received a COVID-19 vaccine booster dose," the agency [cautioned](#).

Cruise lines are requiring all crew and most, if not all, passengers to be fully vaccinated to sail. Passengers also need proof of a recent negative test before boarding.

In addition to the 92 ships with passengers on board, 18 vessels are in U.S. waters with crew only, according to the CDC. Of those, two have met the threshold for investigation, and three have reported cases but not enough to warrant an investigation. Thirteen crew-only ships have reported no cases, according to the data.

"As part of investigating cruise ships that meet the investigation threshold, CDC will obtain additional information from the cruise ship, such as case exposure histories, details about close contacts, traveler vaccination rates, and medical capacities," CDC spokeswoman Caitlin Shockey said in an email.

She said the agency would work closely with cruise lines and "consider multiple factors" before moving ships from their current status — yellow — to the more serious red status, in which a ship would return to port right away or delay a sailing. To reach that mark, a ship must have sustained transmission of covid-19 or covid-like illness and the potential for "cases to overwhelm on board medical center resources," the CDC [says](#).

Since late December, several cruises have been [turned away](#) from ports because of passengers or crew on board testing positive. Most have continued on their journeys, even when they were forced to skip the stops they had planned.

On Wednesday, however, Norwegian Cruise Line [confirmed](#) it was canceling a nine-day Caribbean voyage on Norwegian Getaway that was scheduled to leave Miami that day. The reason, according to the cruise line: "COVID related circumstances."

The operator gave the same reason on Tuesday for bringing a ship, Norwegian Pearl, back to Miami after it left for an 11-night Panama Canal trip Monday. According to [the Miami Herald](#), passengers were informed that the trip was ending after an unspecified number of crew tested positive; the company would not provide that number to The Washington Post. The vessel is scheduled to return to Miami on Thursday.

"We will never compromise on health and safety and we will of course, continue to take all appropriate action to ensure everyone's well-being and to protect public health," the company said in a [statement](#).

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HEADLINE	01/05 DOH: 899,036 cases, 9909 deaths
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article257081182.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article257081182.html</a>
GIST	The Washington state Department of Health reported 11,325 new COVID-19 cases Wednesday, a record high since the start of the pandemic.



	As of Wednesday, statewide totals from the illness caused by the coronavirus are 899,036 cases and 9,909 deaths. The case total includes 105,985 infections listed as probable. Deaths were not updated Wednesday due to a technical issue. In addition, DOH said total case counts could include up to 500 duplicates.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Snow in passes, rain floods in lowlands</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/another-round-of-snow-and-rain-is-headed-to-puget-sound-region/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/another-round-of-snow-and-rain-is-headed-to-puget-sound-region/</a>
GIST	<p>Another round of significant snow in the mountains and heavy rain elsewhere in Western Washington fell Wednesday afternoon, according to the National Weather Service of Seattle.</p> <p>The precipitation was expected to be significant enough to affect travel, particularly for people traveling across the state.</p> <p>By Wednesday evening, snow started to accumulate in the Cascade range. While it rained in Whatcom County, there were a few isolated reports of snowfall in Bremerton and other parts of Kitsap County, said NWS meteorologist Jacob DeSlitch.</p> <p>Snow in the mountain passes is expected to transition into rain Thursday for Snoqualmie Pass and continue as heavy snow in Stevens Pass.</p> <p>By Thursday, up to 3 feet of snow was expected on Stevens Pass, while Snoqualmie was expected to see 12 to 18 inches between Wednesday and Thursday, according to the weather service.</p> <p>“We’re gearing up for a massive storm, which could dump a couple of feet of snow by Thursday!” the Washington Department of Transportation tweeted about passes in the Cascade Mountains. “If you can delay your trip over the next 24 hours pls do. We’re going to see very challenging driving conditions with major delays.”</p> <p><a href="#">Record snowfall has been recorded this year at Snoqualmie Pass</a>, with 236 inches of snow as of Jan. 3, the most in 20 years.</p> <p>In some areas at lower elevations, a quarter of an inch to a half-inch of rain per hour could fall, said weather service meteorologist Maddie Kristell. The heaviest rains are predicted in southwestern Washington, with as much as 3 inches predicted overnight in Chehalis.</p> <p>NWS Seattle issued a flood watch for low-lying portions of Western Washington on Thursday.</p> <p>“People near low-lying rivers and basins could see steep and significant rising,” Kristell said.</p> <p>Western Washington will see persistent rain through Thursday, which will give way to showers on Friday, NWS meteorologist Justin Pullin said.</p> <p>Temperatures in the Seattle area were expected to be in the 40s by Thursday morning, Pullin said.</p> <p>More showers are predicted for Saturday, but Sunday looks dry for most of the region, Pullin said.</p> <p>Icy road conditions remain in some areas, and some schools around the Puget Sound area were <a href="#">closed or opened late Wednesday</a> because of weather and road conditions.</p> <p><a href="#">Sound Transit’s N Line route was not running</a> on Wednesday after a landslide earlier this week. On the eastern edge of the Olympic Peninsula, along Hood Canal, downed power lines and trees have kept a <a href="#">40-mile stretch of Highway 101 closed since Sunday</a>.</p>

	<p>The closure on 101 runs between milepost 284.63 near Highway 104, and milepost 332.0 near Highway 119. The Washington State Department of Transportation has not given an estimated time for reopening.</p> <p>Stevens, Snoqualmie and White passes were open on Wednesday after several days of intermittent closures.</p> <p>And if Sunday's dry weather has you feeling parched, don't worry; it looks like another rainy system will be here next week.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/06 Japan asks US military to stay on bases</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/us-forces-in-japan-ordered-to-wear-masks-as-covid-cases-jump/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/us-forces-in-japan-ordered-to-wear-masks-as-covid-cases-jump/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>TOKYO (AP) — Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi on Thursday asked that the U.S. military in Japan stay inside its bases to prevent the further spread of COVID-19.</p> <p>Hayashi said he spoke on the phone with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and was promised utmost efforts to ensure people's health. It was not immediately clear if a base curfew would be issued.</p> <p>Maj. Thomas R. Barger, a U.S. Forces in Japan spokesperson, said he could not comment on the request, but that a team was carefully monitoring cases and trends.</p> <p>Hayashi's request came as the U.S. military is promising more stringent measures to curb spreading cases. The new measures require all personnel, even when fully vaccinated, to wear masks on base until a third negative coronavirus test, and reiterate an order for all to wear masks when off base, Barger said.</p> <p>American forces have come under fire after a spike in coronavirus cases in areas where they are based in large numbers, including Okinawa and Iwakuni, both in southern Japan.</p> <p>Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said he has decided to tighten virus restrictions in Okinawa, Yamaguchi prefecture, where Iwakuni is located, and Hiroshima.</p> <p>"Quick action is needed given the rapid spread of the omicron variant," he said.</p> <p>The measures center on reducing the hours that alcohol can be served in eateries and bars and preparing the health care system to respond to surging cases. The steps will become official Friday after Kishida meets with experts and a report is made to Parliament. Kishida also stressed he strongly supported Hayashi's request to the U.S. military.</p> <p>Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki sent a request to Japan's national government earlier in the day for permission to strengthen the prefecture's anti-virus measures.</p> <p>A daily record of 981 people tested positive for COVID-19 in Okinawa on Thursday. In December, there were zero new cases on some days.</p> <p>"If we all work together, we hope cases will come down," Tamaki told reporters.</p> <p>Japan has never had a lockdown, but measures have periodically been taken to restrict people's activities, such as requesting stores and restaurants to close early or serve fewer people. Such measures were lifted in September.</p> <p>Tamaki has blamed U.S. soldiers for what he called "the alarming rise" of cases on Okinawa, which has been hit harder than the rest of Japan. He promised financial aid for businesses that abide by the restrictions.</p>

	<p>Yamaguchi prefecture also sent a request to the national government to strengthen anti-virus measures after it confirmed a record 181 daily COVID cases. Yamaguchi prefectural officials suspect the illness spread from U.S. soldiers and Japanese military personnel who work on Iwakuni.</p> <p>Cases are gradually rising throughout Japan, including in Tokyo, which reported 641 new cases Thursday, up from 390 the previous day. Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike has so far been reluctant to order restrictive measures.</p> <p>Japan beefed up border controls late last year, preventing travel from abroad except for returning residents and citizens. American soldiers are basically free to enter and move about Japan under a bilateral security agreement. The U.S. is Japan's most important ally.</p> <p>COVID-19 cases among U.S. Forces in Japan now total 1,784, about a third of them on Okinawa, according to USFJ. Iwakuni has reported a total of 529 cases.</p> <p>"The mitigation measures we have instituted throughout USFJ are intended to protect our force's readiness, the well-being of our families, and the health of Japan's citizens. We recognize we all have a part to play in keeping our communities safe," U.S. Forces in Japan said in a statement.</p> <p>This week, Japan has been reporting more than 2,000 new cases daily, but that shot up to 4,221 on Thursday, with cases tripling in many areas compared to the previous week. About 80% of the population has had two vaccine shots, but boosters are just getting started. Japan has had 18,300 coronavirus-related deaths.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Questions remain: mayor's missing texts</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kuow.org/stories/questions-on-seattle-mayor-s-missing-texts-unanswered-as-durkan-leaves-office">https://www.kuow.org/stories/questions-on-seattle-mayor-s-missing-texts-unanswered-as-durkan-leaves-office</a>
GIST	<p>Former Mayor Jenny Durkan has left office, leaving behind unanswered questions about the contents of 10 months worth of her missing text messages.</p> <p>City of Seattle records officers learned last year that nearly 10 months of the mayor's text messages — from Aug. 28, 2019, to June 25, 2020 — were missing. By state law, these records must be kept, and turned over when requested by the public.</p> <p>It was later discovered that a retention toggle on one of the mayor's three work phones had been switched to the 30-day retention setting. There has been no explanation about who engaged the setting, or why they did.</p> <p>In a recent interview with KUOW, Durkan said most of her messages have been recovered. The approach was not forensic; the texts were found by asking city employees to share texts that Durkan had sent them.</p> <p>"We have been working to recover, and have been able to recover most of the messages," Durkan told KUOW's Angela King, in an exit interview in December.</p> <p>Missing, however, would be messages exchanged with people who were not employed by the City of Seattle.</p> <p>Of the missing texts, Durkan said she had thought they were being retained and archived by the city.</p> <p>Meanwhile, two lawsuits prompted by the city's handling of the missing texts remain ongoing, a forensics report on one of the mayor's devices is long overdue, and the city has transitioned to the leadership of Mayor Bruce Harrell.</p>

City employees discovered the texts were missing after a flurry of public records requests sought records of city communication during the summer of 2020, former records officers Kimberly Ferreiro and Stacy Irwin wrote in a lawsuit against the city. They are suing over allegations of wrongful discharge.

The City later found that former police chief Carmen Best and Fire Chief Harold Scoggins were also missing text messages from their phones from that time.

Reporters were interested in this period to better understand the handling of protests following the Minneapolis police murder of George Floyd. Night after night, Seattle protesters tried to march past the East Precinct on Capitol Hill, and police responded with tear gas and blast balls. Seattle police left the precinct building in early June — but there was confusion over who made the call to leave.

Before leaving office, Durkan pledged to create a more transparent record keeping system.

“The other thing that was really important to me was not just how did this happen, but how do we make sure it doesn't happen again?” Durkan said. “So we put in a range of policies and technology changes, so that we couldn't lose this kind of electronic data.”

An advisory group will be formed to uncover what could be done better, faster, she said.

Durkan said that she believes the public has a right to access public records and “know what its government is doing.”

Behind the scenes, Michelle Chen, Durkan's former legal counsel, calculated how to act. How would Chen, and the two records officers she supervised, respond when reporters and the public asked that they disclose documents that didn't exist?

As previously reported by The Seattle Times — the newspaper is suing the city over allegations of mishandling their records requests — Chen first wanted the approval of Mike Fong, former deputy mayor, and Stephanie Formas, Durkan's former chief of staff, before acting.

A Seattle records officer wrote to Chen in December 2020, asking that Chen meet with her and the other records officer in charge of turning over the mayor's texts.

“Yes, that's fine to meet just the 3 of us first, but I don't want to raise your and Stacy [Irwin's] expectation that I am the decision-maker on this one,” Chen replied. “This is too high profile and too much at stake that I need to run this up and get Formas or Fong's sign-off.

“I have been emailing Formas about it with the recommendation that you made to me, and that I made to her that we have some verbiage for the text messages that we can't recreate.”

When city staff released records to KUOW in November, in response to a records request for six days worth of Durkan's text messages in June 2020, they did not disclose that the text messages were not taken from the mayor's device or that the mayor's texts were missing.

“This request will be the first request released with the missing text situation and will determine how we move forward if missing text messages cannot be retrieved,” the records officer handling KUOW's request wrote to Chen in November.

“Go ahead, invoice and release it with no additional comment (in other words just use your standard verbiage that includes sorry for the delay due to covid etc .. ). If (the reporter) appeals or has any follow up we will cross that bridge when we come to it. She may not even pick it up as many requestors tend to do,” Chen wrote back.

	<p>After the records officer had requested the meeting with Chen, the records officer wrote to another employee months later that it never happened. “I was willing to stand up to Formas that we have to tell the requestees that these are not ALL the records.”</p> <p>Formas said responses to requestors were run past the City Attorney’s Office in this case.</p> <p>KUOW submitted a records request for a forensics report on one of Durkan's cell phones, launched after a city records officer filed a whistleblower complaint against her boss, Chen and Durkan’s texts discovered missing. A public records officer for the Seattle City Attorney’s Office said Dan Nolte, the department’s public information officer, would provide the report once completed.</p> <p>At the end of 2021, KUOW again reached out to the city attorney’s office, and was told that Nolte no longer works for the city attorney and there were “no updates” on the report.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Kazakhstan: dozens killed in crackdown</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/dozens-killed-in-kazakhstan-as-authorities-crack-down-on-unrest-11641462504?mod=hp_lead_pos10">https://www.wsj.com/articles/dozens-killed-in-kazakhstan-as-authorities-crack-down-on-unrest-11641462504?mod=hp_lead_pos10</a>
GIST	<p>MOSCOW—Dozens of people were killed in Kazakhstan on Thursday as authorities moved <a href="#">against protesters in the Central Asian nation</a> after several days of unrest and an alliance of troops from former Soviet states arrived to support local forces.</p> <p>Russian news agency TASS reported that dozens of attackers were killed as they stormed administrative buildings and the police department in Almaty, Kazakhstan’s largest city.</p> <p>They “have been eliminated and their identities are being established,” Saltanat Azirbek, a spokeswoman for the city’s police department, said on Kazakh state television, Khabar 24, according to TASS.</p> <p>The state television channel also reported that 12 law enforcement officers were killed and more than 350 injured, according to news agency Interfax, reporting from the Kazakh capital Nur-Sultan. One of the officers was decapitated, the news agency said, citing reports from Kazakh state media.</p> <p>Authorities also reported that more than 1,000 people have been injured and 400 were hospitalized.</p> <p>Video published by TASS showed soldiers in the streets discharging volleys of machine-gun fire and supported by armored trucks.</p> <p>The protests <a href="#">began on Sunday</a> in Kazakhstan’s western Mangistau region after the government lifted caps on prices for liquefied petroleum gas, the main fuel for cars, causing prices to double. On Wednesday, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a Russian-led intergovernmental military alliance, announced its troops had been sent to Kazakhstan for a limited time “to stabilize and normalize the situation.”</p> <p>The force included units of the armed forces of Russia, Armenia, Belarus, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, the CSTO said, noting that the deployment would be for a limited period.</p> <p>Their deployment came after Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said Wednesday that he had sought assistance from the alliance to help overcome what he described as terrorist threat.</p> <p>It couldn’t be determined whether any of the troops were involved in the killing of the civilians.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Fed faster timetable raising interest rates</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/fed-minutes-reflect-growing-unease-over-high-inflation-11641409628?mod=hp_lead_pos2">https://www.wsj.com/articles/fed-minutes-reflect-growing-unease-over-high-inflation-11641409628?mod=hp_lead_pos2</a>

Federal Reserve officials at their meeting last month eyed a faster timetable for raising interest rates this year, potentially as soon as in March, amid greater discomfort with high inflation.

Minutes of their [Dec. 14-15 meeting](#), released Wednesday, showed officials believed that rising inflation and a very tight labor market could call for lifting short-term rates “sooner or at a faster pace than participants had earlier anticipated.”

Some officials also thought the Fed should start shrinking its \$8.76 trillion portfolio of bonds and other assets relatively soon after beginning to raise rates, the minutes said. Investors would see the move as another way for the Fed to tighten financial conditions to cool the economy.

Stocks turned sharply lower after the minutes were released Wednesday afternoon. The blue-chip Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 1.1%, while the tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite Index lost 3.3%.

Meanwhile, government bond yields rose Wednesday. After the minutes were released, trading in interest-rate futures markets implied a roughly two-thirds probability that the Fed would raise rates in March, according to CME Group.

Julia Coronado, founder of economic-advisory firm MacroPolicy Perspectives, said that the minutes prompted her to move up her forecast for rate increases to begin in March, instead of June.

“The Fed is on a glide path to hiking in March,” said Neil Dutta, an economist at research firm Renaissance Macro. “It is hard to see what is going to hold them back.”

Most central bank officials, in projections released after last month’s meeting, penciled in at least three quarter-percentage-point rate increases this year. In September, around half of the group thought rate increases could wait until 2023.

For months, [Fed leaders stuck to a view](#) that higher price pressures in 2021 were caused primarily by supply-chain bottlenecks and would ease on their own. But Fed Chairman Jerome Powell had before the meeting signaled much less conviction about that forecast, and other officials last month broadly shared his views.

“While participants generally continued to anticipate that inflation would decline significantly over the course of 2022 as supply constraints eased, almost all stated that they had revised up their forecasts of inflation for 2022 notably, and many did so for 2023 as well,” the minutes said.

One immediate sign of their concerns could be seen from [plans they approved at that meeting](#) to more quickly scale back, or taper, their asset purchases. The program is now on track to end in March instead of June.

The Fed wants to end the bond-buying program, a form of economic stimulus, before it lifts short-term rates to curb inflation. “The whole point of accelerating the tapering was...so the March meeting could be a live meeting” to raise rates, said Fed governor Christopher Waller in remarks on Dec. 17. “That was the intent.”

Officials in their postmeeting statement described their goal of inflation moderately exceeding their 2% target as being met, one of two key criteria the central bank has laid out to justify raising rates.

The minutes showed that most officials believe they could “fast approach” their second goal of achieving labor market conditions consistent with maximum employment if recent hiring progress continues.

Several officials said last month that higher inflation pressures could force the Fed to raise rates before the employment goal had been met, and some officials thought it had already been met, according to the minutes.

The shift is the latest sign of how an acceleration and broadening of inflationary pressures, [amid a tight labor market](#), have reshaped officials' economic outlook and policy planning.

Fed officials' decision to take their foot off the gas more quickly reflects a shifting calculus about the potential for stronger demand to push up prices—such as wages and rents—even after supply-chain bottlenecks and shortages of items such as cars abate.

Brisk demand for goods, disrupted supply chains and various shortages have pushed 12-month inflation to [its highest readings in decades](#). Core consumer prices, which exclude volatile food and energy categories, were up 4.7% in November from a year earlier, according to the Fed's preferred gauge. That is well above both the Fed's 2% target and officials' stated desire to have inflation run slightly above that target.

"There's a real risk now, I believe, that inflation may be more persistent and...the risk of higher inflation becoming entrenched has increased," said Mr. Powell at a news conference on Dec. 15.

While officials last month cited the Omicron variant of the coronavirus as a risk, the minutes suggest officials didn't see it as a serious headwind for the economy.

The minutes also provided more detail around preliminary discussions officials had last month over how and when to [shrink their \\$8.76 trillion portfolio](#) of Treasury and mortgage securities, which doubled in size amid efforts to stabilize the economy over the past two years.

The bond-buying programs stimulate the economy by holding down long-term interest rates, encouraging consumers and businesses to borrow and spend. In theory, doing so should also spur financial markets by driving investors into stocks, corporate bonds and other assets.

Once the Fed stops buying assets, it could keep the holdings steady by reinvesting the proceeds of maturing securities into new ones, which should have an economically neutral effect. Alternatively, the Fed could allow its holdings to shrink by allowing bonds to mature, or run off, which would be a form of policy tightening.

Last decade, the Fed kept its holdings steady for around two years after it first raised interest rates before gradually shrinking its holdings in 2017. Most officials last month thought they should start shrinking their holdings sooner this time because the economy is stronger, inflation is high and the asset portfolio is much larger, the minutes said.

Officials also thought it would be appropriate to shrink the asset portfolio faster than they did at the end of the last decade.

The minutes suggest shrinking the Fed's asset portfolio "will be a more prominent feature of tightening than last time," said Ms. Coronado.

Fed officials could resume deliberations over their portfolio run-off tactics at their next meeting, Jan. 25-26.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Military challenge: defeat hobbyist drones
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-militarys-new-challenge-defeating-cheap-hobbyist-drones-11641401270?mod=hp_lead_pos12">https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-militarys-new-challenge-defeating-cheap-hobbyist-drones-11641401270?mod=hp_lead_pos12</a>
GIST	<p>The U.S. is racing to combat an ostensibly modest foe: hobbyist drones that cost a few hundred dollars and can be rigged with explosives.</p> <p>Emerging solutions resemble the stuff of science fiction, from laser zappers to microwave blasters.</p>



Small, cheap drones are the most-concerning new tactical threat to face the U.S. military since the rise of improvised explosive devices in Iraq some 15 years ago, according to the head of U.S. Central Command, Marine Gen. Kenneth McKenzie.

The rapid development of inexpensive unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, has enabled irregular forces, terrorist groups and national armies to attack high-value targets at low cost.

“I am very concerned about it,” Gen. McKenzie told the House Armed Services Committee in April. “We still have a ways to go to get on the right side of the curve with this, because right now you can go out and buy one at [Walmart](#) or some other location, you can weaponize it very readily.”

Insurgent groups such as Islamic State and [Yemen’s Houthi rebels](#) have rigged commercial, off-the-shelf drones with explosives to attack expensive armored vehicles and military installations as well as [oil refineries](#), [ports](#) and [civilian airports](#). The UAVs are often bought on the internet or assembled from parts bought online.

Iranian-backed [Shiite militias in Iraq stepped up drone attacks](#) in 2021. They included strikes on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the [Iraqi prime minister’s residence](#), in what security officials called an assassination attempt against him. Drones slammed into a [commercial ship in the Arabian Sea in July, killing two crew](#), as well as the main [Saudi royal complex in Riyadh](#). Armed drones were brought down at the Baghdad airport on Monday and near an air base in Iraq hosting U.S. troops on Tuesday, and another was shot down early Thursday local time near another Iraqi base.

The bargain-basement weapon is a particular challenge for the U.S., which is focused on the threat of potential war with high-end militaries in China or Russia, and is plowing billions into advanced systems, from sophisticated missiles to giant aircraft carriers. The high quantities of drones mean traditional defenses against aerial attacks, such as million-dollar missiles, don’t make sense.

Drone attacks on Saudi Arabia by Iran and groups it supports have highlighted the cost imbalance. Riyadh often responds by firing Patriot surface-to-air missiles, which cost around \$3 million each, and scrambling fighter jets to shoot drones down. [Saudi Arabia is running low on missile interceptors, The Wall Street Journal has reported](#).

The U.S. is racing to develop defenses that meet the technology at a more-equivalent cost. It is focusing on lasers and microwaves because they are powered by electricity, which gives more bang for the buck and can quickly target large numbers of small drones.

The U.S. has fielded a variety of systems across the armed services, from hand-held signal jammers that look like a weapon from Ghostbusters or Star Wars to laser shooters mounted on trucks.

The military has been unable to deploy the systems in large numbers, and no single one has integrated the abilities to track and target several types of drones with the most suitable weapon. Recognizing the urgency and need to consolidate efforts, the Army in 2020 took charge of a new office to lead and direct the search for solutions.

Small drones fly low, slowly and can sharply change course, confusing radar that is scanning for large, fast, highflying aircraft or missiles. If drones are laden with explosives, simply forcing them out of the sky can endanger people and facilities on the ground. And when deployed in large groups, drones could overwhelm even sophisticated defenses.

To better identify and track drones, militaries are seeking to fuse data from various sensors including radar, cameras and radio-frequency scanners.

U.S. forces first encountered [small attack drones in large numbers in Iraq](#) in 2016, fielded by Islamic State militants. The Pentagon quickly equipped its forces with dozens of hand-held ant drone weapons that jam the signal between aerial vehicles and their base stations.

The downing of an Iranian drone in 2019 in the Strait of Hormuz by a radio-frequency jammer mounted on a Marine utility vehicle [aboard the USS Boxer](#) was a turning point. The downing by the electric-powered weapon, its first in the field, was a cheaper option than firing one of the ship's missiles.

But jamming quickly became outmoded. Drones' anti-jamming capabilities improved, and attackers adapted by putting drones on autopilot, which curtailed communications and rendered jamming ineffective. Jamming has other drawbacks, because it can interfere with the signals of friendly military or civilian equipment.

The most promising systems, military leaders and defense contractors say, intercept drones by firing microwaves to fry their electronics or lasers to burn holes in their motors or other critical parts.

A big reason for the focus on these tactics, known as directed-energy weapons, is the cost. Initial investments can be high, in the millions of dollars, but once operational the cost per shot is about the price of electricity: "A cup of diesel," says Ron Dauk, program manager for laser and electro-optical systems at Boeing Co.

Compared with missiles, "your cost goes down substantially, and you've got enough munitions that you can fire again and again and again at however many UAVs are coming," said Air Force Major Gen. Alexis A. Grynkeiwich, U.S. Central Command's operations director.

The systems vary in power and size. A 300-kilowatt laser under development by Boeing and General Atomics is aimed at shooting down missiles and manned aircraft as well as drones. Kord Technologies, a unit of KBR Inc., and Raytheon Technologies Corp. won an Army contract to deliver 50-kilowatt lasers mounted on Stryker armored fighting vehicles.

The Marines and Air Force have already fielded laser systems from Boeing and Raytheon that can be fixed to tripods to provide area security, for example around a forward operating base, or deployed on tactical vehicles for greater mobility, including near the front lines of battle.

The Navy began trying out laser prototypes in 2009, on land and later at sea. In December, it tested a high-energy laser weapon aboard a ship sailing off the coast of Yemen, where Houthi rebels backed by Iran have weaponized bomb-laden drone boats in addition to unmanned aircraft. The Navy said the system "successfully engaged" its target, without providing more details.

High-powered microwave weapons use bursts of intense radio waves that can cook electronics—just like food—and drop small unmanned aircraft out of the sky.

The Air Force is developing a high-powered microwave weapon to defeat groups of drones with a system made up of a radar dish and microwave cannon mounted atop a 20-foot shipping container. In a recent field assessment, the system zapped down 90% of its targets, and officials say they can edge toward 100%.

Lockheed Martin Corp. has developed an interceptor that can fit in a backpack and be launched from a six-inch tube to target other drones with microwaves. The weapon can be recovered, charged and reused.

Epirus Inc., a Silicon Valley startup, is collaborating with General Dynamics Corp. to integrate a microwave weapon on Stryker vehicles.

Still, microwaves can interfere with other systems, so they are less effective in urban environments. Even in open fields they can produce "friendly fire," damaging other weapons systems. Their impact on birds and other animals isn't known.

Lasers can be impaired by rain, snow, fog or smoke, and they can bounce off reflective surfaces or miss their target and carry on farther, potentially causing collateral damage. Compared with microwaves, which

can target a broad area, they can engage only one drone at a time and must focus on each one for a longer period.

Because no single system is capable of defending against the full and growing range of drone threats across the various environments where they operate, the challenge for counterdrone strategists is how to stitch together multiple weapons.

Most U.S. bases in the Middle East have layered their defenses with a variety of systems, which are each designed to confront different threats with varying degrees of effectiveness. The proliferation of systems—each with a specific capability for a specific drone and in various stages of development—complicates operators’ ability to respond to attacks.

“Everything evolved piecemeal. We’ve frankensteined it together a bit,” said Gen. Grynkewich.

The Pentagon is now working toward a unified system that can give early warning, identify a drone’s origin and altitude, and provide options for engagement, according to Gen. McKenzie. “We do not yet have a single system that can do all that,” he said. “That’s part of the problem: We’re not integrated.”

The target for military planners is evolving as drone technology rapidly evolves.

One growing concern is swarms, where dozens of small drones controlled by artificial intelligence attack a target simultaneously. The problem is compounded if the drones are of various sizes and capabilities, requiring different weapons to counter them.

Epirus is testing a high-powered microwave system it developed for the military. The company says artificial intelligence enables quick targeting of individual aircraft or swarms.

Advancements in counterdrone technology won’t fully address the problem without regular adjustments, said Austin Doctor, a political scientist and counterterrorism researcher at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. As the Pentagon and others invest in new technology, armed groups will keep innovating as well.

“This is the dance—the back and forth of adaptation,” said Mr. Doctor. “In many ways, the battle between governments and militants is about creativity and anticipating the next move.”

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HEADLINE	01/05 Airlines cancel flights 11 <sup>th</sup> straight day
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/airlines-cancel-more-than-1-000-flights-for-11th-straight-day-11641404452?mod=hp_lista_pos5">https://www.wsj.com/articles/airlines-cancel-more-than-1-000-flights-for-11th-straight-day-11641404452?mod=hp_lista_pos5</a>
GIST	<p>Nearly 1,700 U.S. flights were canceled by Wednesday evening, the 11th straight day of more than 1,000 cancellations and the airline industry’s worst stretch since the start of the pandemic.</p> <p>Airlines also delayed more than 3,900 flights by Wednesday evening, according to aviation data tracker FlightAware. Carriers have now canceled more than 22,000 flights since Christmas Eve.</p> <p>In 2020, the airline industry went through a brutal stretch from late March to early May, when it canceled nearly one-third of all scheduled flights, scrubbing thousands of trips daily for 47 straight days. Carriers slashed flights as travel demand collapsed and border restrictions were imposed during the pandemic’s early weeks in the U.S.</p> <p>The airline industry for months had been confronting labor shortages while consumer demand made a strong comeback. Incentive pay and scaled-back schedules helped the industry get through the Thanksgiving holiday largely without problems.</p>

But then came [the Omicron variant](#), fueling staffing shortages across multiple airlines as crews called in sick. Inclement weather in the Pacific Northwest that spread to the [Midwest and East Coast regions](#) has also magnified problems for the industry.

While some airlines are continuing to scrap big chunks of their daily flight schedules, other carriers including [JetBlue Airways Corp.](#) and [American Airlines Group Inc.](#) have shown some improvement.

[Southwest Airlines Co.](#) canceled 510 flights by Wednesday evening, about 16% of its schedule for the day, and delayed 363, according to FlightAware. The airline said bad weather at its hubs in Baltimore, Denver and Chicago prompted many of the cancellations.

[SkyWest Inc.](#), a commuter carrier that flies on behalf of four major airlines, scrapped 295 flights by Wednesday evening, 13% of its West Coast-focused flights for the day, and delayed an additional 363 trips, according to FlightAware. The carrier said it also is dealing with staff shortages due to Covid-19 and is trimming many of the remaining flights it offers through January to ensure it has adequate staff on hand to operate those flights.

Schools, Wall Street, retailers and businesses across industries throughout the U.S. are feeling the effects of Omicron's surge. But airlines have been particularly affected because they operate under strict safety rules that constrain their ability to respond to staffing disruptions.

Pilots aren't always trained to fly multiple aircraft types. Employees such as flight dispatchers and mechanics can only take on so much extra work safely, meaning airlines at times have no choice but [to resort to cancellations](#).

[Alaska Air Group Inc.](#) canceled 114 flights by Wednesday evening, 16% of its scheduled flights for the day, and delayed another 61.

"Like many other airlines, this latest surge of Covid is driving higher-than-usual absences among all our workgroups," an Alaska Air Group spokeswoman said. "This is compounded by the residual impacts of winter weather in several of our key hubs."

JetBlue, which has scrubbed more than 100 flights over the last seven days, had four cancellations by Wednesday evening. The carrier didn't respond to a request for comment. It has previously said it would trim its schedule through mid-January, citing more of its employees contracting Covid-19.

American Airlines canceled 21 flights by Wednesday evening, after scrapping more than 500 from Saturday through Monday. The company declined to comment.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Anger at city lockdown spreads in China</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/anger-at-xian-lockdown-spreads-in-china-11641433781?mod=hp_listb_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/anger-at-xian-lockdown-spreads-in-china-11641433781?mod=hp_listb_pos1</a>
GIST	<p>Authorities in the Chinese city of Xi'an relented in some of their pandemic restrictions after a nationwide outcry over the account of a woman who lost her unborn baby in the eighth month of pregnancy after being denied medical attention for hours.</p> <p>For two weeks, the city's 13 million residents have been confined to their homes in response to an outbreak in which about 1,800 people have been diagnosed with Covid-19, a big outbreak for China. Most of Xi'an's cases have been mild, authorities say, and no one has died of the virus. Still, the city has closed most public services in measures similar to those in Wuhan, the first epicenter of the coronavirus, two years ago. Only a limited number of Xi'an's hospitals have been open to non-Covid-19 patients.</p> <p>The restrictions had prompted widespread online complaints, but mostly from locals about challenges in getting access to food or medical care. On Wednesday, anger spread nationwide, with social-media expressions of outrage in response to a video showing a woman sitting outside a hospital, with a pool</p>

of blood at her feet. In the one-minute video, people identifying themselves as family members describe how the woman was kept waiting outside the hospital for two hours, allegedly because her most recent Covid-19 test was a couple of hours too old. By the time she was admitted, her unborn baby had died.

The incident seems to have marked a turning point in the public response to some of the most stringent lockdown measures in China, which has espoused a strategy of stamping out the virus wherever it emerges. It prompted a quick response from Xi'an authorities, which said hospitals shouldn't turn away patients needing urgent attention, including pregnant women, in the name of Covid-19 prevention.

Authorities fired several hospital executives and asked the hospital to issue a public apology.

A hospital director told local media on Wednesday that the hospital had done its best, given the Covid-19-prevention rules, adding that the woman had had surgery and was recovering.

The video of the woman, initially released by a local short-video outlet, started to spread widely after official media drew attention to it, an unusual move that suggested some dissatisfaction in Beijing with how Xi'an was handling its lockdown. Social-media accounts reposting the video included ones belonging to the People's Daily, the Communist Party's flagship newspaper, and the press outlet of China's State Council, its cabinet.

By Thursday morning in China, the video had been watched 51 million times. Many who commented said they have in the past defended Xi'an's lockdown measures, but had changed their minds after the woman's account of losing her baby.

"This mother suffered so much...waiting in the cold only to lose her child. Feel suffocated even thinking about it," said one comment on the Twitter-like Weibo platform that drew nearly a quarter-million likes.

"This is so infuriating. The death rate of Covid-19 is dropping, while the costs of 'zero tolerance' are rising," said another comment.

Later on Wednesday, another woman came forward with a similar account.

The woman, who identified herself by her surname, Wang, said in a long Weibo post that on Dec. 29, she was turned away by two hospitals after she started bleeding late in her pregnancy.

The first hospital refused her because she lives in an area with a high rate of Covid-19 infections, while the second hospital said it would only admit Covid-19 patients or their close contacts.

Hours later, with the help of a local police officer, she was accepted at a third hospital. She had already lost too much blood to be able to speak and then found out her unborn baby was dead, her account said.

Her husband and the police officer made repeated calls to the hotline of the local Covid-19 command center to get help, according to her post, but the calls went unanswered.

Ms. Wang said in her post that she had been unable to eat or sleep, consumed by her sorrow, but now wishes she had told her story earlier. "Today when I saw the news, I felt so terrible." Ms. Wang didn't respond to requests for comment.

People poured sympathy on her. "Please don't blame yourself, it's not your fault," one commented. Some blamed the local government for not having better plans for emergencies like hers.

"For some officials, as long as people don't die from Covid, other deaths don't count," another wrote.

	<p>Meanwhile, officials said Xi'an is close to its goal of reducing community spread to zero (meaning cases found outside quarantine centers) and urged locals to continue staying put, be patient and support their work.</p> <p>The city has so far housed more than 42,000 people in hundreds of quarantine centers, which officials say has helped to bring the spread under control. The Xi'an daily case count rose to 63 Wednesday from 35 on Tuesday, according to the latest official figures, still down from more than 100 a few days earlier. Nationwide, the country reported 132 local cases, including 64 in central Henan province.</p> <p>No deaths related to Covid-19 have been reported by officials anywhere in China in the past 11 months.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Amtrak passengers stuck on trains for days</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/01/05/amtrak-train-winter-storm/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2022/01/05/amtrak-train-winter-storm/</a>
GIST	<p>When word began to travel up the aisles that toilets on their long-stalled Amtrak train were stopped up, Malcolm Kenton and his aunt took their lone opportunity to disembark in Lynchburg, Va., still hundreds of miles from their homes.</p> <p>They had spent more than 30 stifling hours onboard, waiting out lengthy delays caused by a winter storm that created a logjam for passenger trains headed up the East Coast that began Monday and continued into Wednesday. Trains were stalled so long that passengers reported arguments breaking out in rail cars, parents begging for spare diapers and onboard cafes running out of food.</p> <p>“We didn’t want to risk staying on a train with no food and no toilets,” said Kenton, 36, who lives near Union Station in D.C.</p> <p>Amtrak delays were just one part of holiday travel upended over the past two weeks, thrown off course by a perfect storm of wintry weather, pilots and airline staff sickened by the omicron variant surge, and what travel officials say was the highest number of travelers who took to rail, roads and the skies since the start of the pandemic. A fast-moving storm on Monday dumped between five and 10 inches of snow in the Washington region, creating a bottleneck in Virginia, snarling traffic on Interstate 95 for more than 36 hours, toppling trees onto tracks and creating the largest regional snowstorm blackout in 11 years.</p> <p>Passengers such as Kenton said Amtrak was unprepared and provided them with little direction or information about the delays.</p> <p>Amtrak spokeswoman Kimberly Woods said delays were caused by downed trees from winter weather. A service alert sent out Wednesday said customers whose trips have been changed are being accommodated on other trains and change fees are being waived.</p> <p>Kenton’s Crescent-line train, running from New Orleans to New York, reversed course to Lynchburg after spending about seven hours stuck in the middle of Virginia. Passengers were given a chance to exit, and Kenton and his aunt Donna took it. Offloading after midnight Wednesday, Kenton begged a ride with a fellow traveler to a hotel, since no taxis or ride-share services were available.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Kenton and his aunt began Day 3 of their journey from Greensboro, N.C., where they had spent the holidays with family, up the East Coast in a rental car. Kenton’s aunt planned to drop him off in the District before continuing on to her home in New York.</p> <p>They won’t soon forget their ordeal, especially standing in a long line at the cafe and buying up what food they could just before the train ran out, leaving many passengers hungry.</p>



“Amtrak routinely fails in crisis management,” Kenton said. “They don’t seem to have any good backup plans. They do things on the fly. So that’s our main complaint this time, and that they weren’t able to stock enough food or get any way of replenishing the water or empty the sewage tanks in Lynchburg.”

On Amtrak’s Auto Train, which carries passengers and their cars between Lorton, Va., and Sanford, Fla., Kip and Anna Knauer and their two young children were in similar straits. They live outside Reading, Pa., and were returning from Disneyworld, their first family vacation since the pandemic, when their train was stopped outside of Petersburg, Va., on Tuesday morning. The conductor told passengers that their delay could last anywhere from one hour to 10 hours, said Kip, 34.

“Of course, this raised alarm,” he said. “I have a 2-year-old and a 1-year-old. So we were concerned. My 2-year-old doesn’t like being confined, so that’s not a good course for him, being stuck on a train.” He added, “But what got me during this time is that no one knew anything. No communication.”

As the hours ticked away, people began to panic and buy up all the food and water at the cafe until it ran out, Kip said. The family had a private cabin, which came with meals, but the rations were so slim, they said, that they ended up with a small bowl of stew and a handful of rice. When the train moved again, it stopped in Richmond and a train attendant picked up stacks of pizza, handing a slice to each passenger.

Over the public address system, Kip said, an Amtrak employee called for passengers to stop fighting. Another asked if anyone had spare diapers for passengers, he said. The Knauers had packed extra snacks and food, and Anna kept her kids’ attention as long as she could by pulling out Play-Doh and other toys and showing them YouTube episodes of the kids show “Cocomelon.”

“Eventually we just sort of let whatever was going to happen, happen,” Anna, 30, said. “We tried to keep the peace as much as we could because we had neighbors.”

The delay was so long that Kip’s parents, who were driving north from the vacation, caught up to the stalled train even while dealing with nightmare traffic jams on Interstate 95. Kip gave them directions to where the train was stuck, and he implored the conductor to allow his family to get off and carpool the rest of the way, but the train official wouldn’t let them off.

The train eventually arrived at Lorton at 1 a.m. Wednesday, Kip said. The family waited another three hours to get their car offloaded, and then Kip put the kids in the car and began their drive back home to Pennsylvania. They arrived at about 6 a.m. — nearly 40 hours from when they had left Florida.

Kip said he paid \$1,700 for the trip, money he wants refunded. He has tried to call Amtrak customer service 54 times, to no avail, he said just a few hours after the family had arrived back home.

The delay on the Auto Train line extended well into Wednesday. A train that left Lorton on Tuesday arrived at Sanford at about 1:30 p.m., four-and-a-half hours late, said passenger Hampden H. Smith III., a snowbird who lives in Lexington, Va.

All around the station parking lot in Sanford were cars waiting to be loaded for the return trip back north to Virginia.

“There were hundreds of cars all over the place waiting to be loaded,” Smith said in an email. “At this rate it will take 4 more days to clear out the delays caused by Monday’s storm.”

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HEADLINE	01/05 FEMA: 135M impacted by climate disasters
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/01/05/climate-disasters-2021-fires/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/01/05/climate-disasters-2021-fires/</a>
GIST	2021 ended as it began: with disaster. Twelve months after an <a href="#">atmospheric river deluged</a> California, triggering mudslides in burned landscapes and leaving a half-million people without power, a late-season <a href="#">wildfire destroyed hundreds of homes</a> in the suburbs of Denver. In between, Americans suffered



blistering heat waves, merciless droughts and monstrous hurricanes. People collapsed in farm fields and drowned in basement apartments; entire communities were obliterated by surging seas and encroaching flames.

More than 4 in 10 Americans live in a county that was struck by climate-related extreme weather last year, according to a new Washington Post analysis of federal disaster declarations, and more than 80 percent experienced a heat wave. In the country that has generated more greenhouse gases than any other nation in history, global warming is expanding its reach and exacting an escalating toll.

At least 656 people died amid the onslaught of disasters, media reports and government records show. The cost of the destruction tops \$104 billion, according to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#), even before officials calculate the final toll of wildfires, drought and heat waves in the West.

While the Federal Emergency Management Agency identified fewer climate-related disasters in individual counties last year, it declared eight of these emergencies statewide — the most since 1998 — encompassing 135 million people overall.

There is little doubt that the future will be worse. [Steadily rising temperatures](#) heighten the risk of wildfires, turbocharge rain storms, exacerbate flooding and intensify drought.

Yet planet-warming pollution, primarily from burning fossil fuels, [surged to near-record highs last year](#). The Build Back Better bill, which contains the [biggest clean energy investment in U.S. history](#), stalled in Congress. The United Nations climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland, produced pledges that put [global average temperatures on track](#) to rise about 2.5 degrees Celsius (4.5 degrees Fahrenheit) by the end of the century — a degree of warming that would transform once unthinkable disasters into near-annual occurrences.

2022 begins with two crucial questions still unanswered: Will the United States invest in ways to make extreme weather less destructive? And will the country lead the world in curbing warming before it becomes impossible for humanity to adapt?

These questions loom over Louisville, Colo., Mayor Ashley Stolzmann, who lost much of her town to wildfire on Thursday.

“When I lay awake the first night, not able to sleep from the fire, when I was evacuated from my house,” she said, “the first thing I thought of is: I need everyone to reduce their carbon emissions.”

Over the course of just a few hours on Dec. 30, raging winds had propelled the flames through vegetation parched by the area’s [warmest and driest summer and fall](#) on record. The Marshall Fire burned so hot and so fast that it was able to jump a six-lane highway to engulf more than 1,000 homes in Louisville and neighboring Superior, quickly becoming the most destructive blaze in state history.

“To lose whole neighborhoods is just so very sad and devastating and unexpected,” Stolzmann said in an interview.

Fires like that are not supposed to happen in densely populated suburbs. They’re not supposed to ignite in December, long after the first snows of the winter have usually fallen.

Yet rising temperatures have intensified wildfire behavior and lengthened the season for when they can burn, scientists say. In [most forest](#) types, the proportion of fires that are “high severity” (killing the majority of vegetation) has at least doubled in recent decades. The weather necessary for fire — high temperatures, low humidity, rainless days and high winds — [lasts more than a month longer](#) than it did four decades ago.

“More people are living in more flammable landscapes,” said Chelsea Nagy, a research scientist at the University of Colorado at Boulder’s Earth Lab. “More people are going to be interfacing with disaster.”

The Post’s analysis of federal data shows that about 15 percent of Americans live in a county that experienced a declared fire disaster this year, a number that has been steadily increasing since 2018.

It is a testament to the way climate change “has loaded the weather dice against us,” climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe said.

Think of the climate as a bell curve, with temperatures distributed according to how common they ought to be. The center of the bell curve has shifted slightly, with the world just over a degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than in the preindustrial era. But the area of the curve now in the “extreme” zone has increased significantly.

To assess Americans’ exposure to climate disasters, The Post considered FEMA declarations around severe storms, hurricanes, floods, wildfires and droughts — events that research shows are made more likely and more severe by rising temperatures.

For every 1 degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming, the atmosphere can hold 7 percent more moisture, resulting in exponentially wetter storms. When the remnants of Hurricane Ida hit the New York metro area in September, [rainfall rates of three to four inches per hour](#) overwhelmed a sewage system that was designed to handle less than half that amount. From the mountains of North Carolina to the narrows of the Grand Canyon to the streets of Bloomington, Ind., and rural parts of Tennessee, flash floods killed more than 100 Americans.

Conversely, the relationship between air temperature and humidity means that warmer conditions make the atmosphere “thirstier.” Water quickly evaporates from vegetation and soil, intensifying drought and making forests more likely to burn. On the Klamath River, water shortages [sickened fish and emptied wells](#). In California, the Dixie Fire [burned an area larger](#) than New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago and Dallas combined. More than 90 percent of the United States west of the Rockies was in drought last year.

Meanwhile, melting polar ice caps have raised global sea levels an average of eight or nine inches since 1880, heightening the risk of coastal floods. The heat absorbed by the oceans lends fuel to hurricanes, enabling mere tropical depressions to rapidly intensify into devastating Category 4 and 5 storms. Not a single structure was left undamaged after Hurricane Ida made landfall near Grand Isle, La., in September. Surging waves ripped apart houses and obliterated levees; howling winds left the barrier island community buried under [three feet of sand](#).

The Post also analyzed heat wave data from roughly 7,500 NOAA temperature monitors across the nation, finding that 80 percent of Americans live in a county that experienced at least one day of abnormally high temperatures last year.

Although extreme heat is not officially considered a disaster, it is one of the most fatal forms of severe weather. Officials say that at least 227 people were killed by the record-shattering heat dome that struck the Pacific Northwest in late June — a figure that is almost certainly an undercount.

The science of attribution allows researchers to link these crises to human-caused warming. Using sophisticated computer models, they compare real-world disasters to historical phenomena and simulations of how those events might have unfolded in a preindustrial world.

Two of last year’s biggest weather crises cannot be definitively tied to climate change: the February “deep freeze” that left millions without power from Texas to Ohio, and the December tornado outbreak that killed dozens of people across Kentucky. Combined, these disasters affected counties that are home to roughly 15 percent of the U.S. population.

Even though climate change will make frigid weather less likely, some scientists have suggested that warming in the Arctic can lead to [fluctuations in the polar vortex](#), allowing tongues of cold air to lash out into lower latitudes. Other studies indicate that [warmer winter temperatures](#) provided fuel for the late-season thunderstorms that gave rise to December's twisters.

But Michael Wehner, a climate scientist at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, said more attribution research on both types of these disasters is needed to determine whether climate change increased the likelihood of these events. For that reason, The Post did not include the deep freeze and tornadoes in its climate disaster analysis.

On the other hand, some recent events were made so extreme by rising temperatures that "they break statistical models," Wehner said. The Pacific Northwest heat dome, which scientists say was "virtually impossible" without climate change, was one such event. Last week's Marshall Fire is likely to be another.

"It's such an outlier, we don't have anything to compare it to. How do you put statistics on that?" Wehner said.

This is what makes climate change so dangerous. In a steadily warming world, disasters can happen in places, at times and with intensities never seen before. They overwhelm infrastructure that wasn't built to deal with them. They catch communities unprepared.

Yet people can change even faster than the climate, Wehner said, giving the United States a chance to adapt.

Climate was not the only factor contributing to last week's conflagration in the Denver suburbs. The initial spark almost certainly came from a human source. The 100 mph winds made the blaze far more difficult to fight. Ongoing development in fire-prone areas adds to the devastation when the inevitable occurs.

Many of these factors are within people's control, Nagy said. Public awareness campaigns around issues such as extinguishing campfires and cigarette butts, as well as industrial safety measures like burying power lines, can cut the number of "human ignitions," which are behind the vast majority of fires that burn in the United States. Building codes and zoning regulations can be updated to make structures less flammable and prevent people from moving into areas that are impossible to defend.

Saving lives also requires investing in social infrastructure, said Patricia Romero-Lankao, a sociologist at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. It means strengthening health-care access, so people are less vulnerable to the effects of smoke from fires and mold from floods. It means improving government outreach to non-English speakers and other marginalized groups. Cultivating connections between neighbors, so that people know who needs help during an evacuation and whom to check on when the mercury spikes to dangerous highs, can protect the most vulnerable.

"We need to build safety nets, a sense of belonging, a sense of shared space to deal with this," she said. "It's not only technical solutions."

Louisville, where hundreds of homes were lost last week, has already adopted some of these measures, Stolzmann said. Flameproof building materials and carbon-free appliances are required in new construction. The community's scattered residents are connected by text chains, which they use to check on one another's houses, recommend contractors, offer reassurance.

Still, there are limits on people's capacity to adapt, Wehner said, since disasters will become exponentially worse for every incremental increase in temperature.

"When we look back at the world that was and compare it to our 1 degree Celsius warmer world, the change is a lot," Wehner said. "But when you compare that to 1.5 degrees, it's a larger change. And then compare it to 2 to 3 degrees" — where scientists say the world is headed — "it's kind of off the charts."

HEADLINE	01/05 France car ads now come w/alternatives
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/01/05/france-car-ads-alternatives/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/01/05/france-car-ads-alternatives/</a>
GIST	<p>In France, advertisements urging people to buy the latest Peugeots or Renaults will soon come with a caveat urging viewers or listeners to walk or bike instead.</p> <p>Under a new regulation slated to take effect in March, French automakers will be required to include messages on car advertisements that encourage viewers to seek more environmentally friendly travel alternatives.</p> <p>Automakers will be able to choose between three messages, according to the rule published in France's official journal: "Consider carpooling," "For short trips, opt for walking or cycling" or "Use public transportation for everyday trips." At the end of the message, advertisers must affix the hashtag "#SeDéplacerMoinsPolluer" — or #MovePolluteLess.</p> <p>The requirement is to apply to ads distributed on radio, television, in theaters, on the Internet and on big screens as well as to print ads. If advertisers fail to include the message, they can be fined up to about \$56,000.</p> <p>Similar measures are already in place in France for food advertisements, which instruct French consumers to cut back on junk food and eat more fruits and vegetables.</p> <p>In countries across the world, tobacco ads often carry admonitions that smoking can cause cancer and death — and in France, they're completely prohibited. The country began to require plain cigarette packaging in 2016. (Regulations around advertising are particularly lax in the United States, one of the few countries to allow pharmaceutical companies to advertise directly to consumers.)</p> <p>France's move follows years of lobbying from environmental groups, which have called for a ban on car ads. Beginning on March 1, car manufacturers must also include a vehicle's carbon-dioxide emissions class in promotions, <a href="#">French newspaper Le Monde reported</a>. Ads for the highest-polluting vehicles will be banned beginning in 2028.</p> <p>"Decarbonizing transportation does not only mean switching to an electric motor. It also means using public transportation or cycling when possible," French Ecological Transition Minister Barbara Pompili <a href="#">wrote on Twitter last week</a>, commenting on the new advertising rules.</p> <p>The measures come as France ramps up efforts to combat climate change. France's High Council on Climate warned over the summer that the country was not on track to meet its pledge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent compared with 1990 levels by the end of the decade.</p> <p>Transportation-related emissions <a href="#">make up a quarter</a> of the European Union's greenhouse gas emissions, according to the European Environment Agency.</p> <p>Limiting the use of polluting cars is one pillar of France's approach to tackling climate change. Major climate legislation passed over the summer includes provisions to phase out advertising for gasoline and other fossil fuel energy, and to provide subsidies for drivers who swap out polluting cars for cleaner models.</p> <p>Carmakers aired mixed reactions in French media to the upcoming advertising requirements. Volkswagen <a href="#">told French media</a> it would follow the regulations, as did Hyundai's French division.</p> <p>"I am taking note, we will adapt," Lionel French Keogh, chief executive of Hyundai in France, told Agence France-Presse. "Zero-emission transportation is the future."</p>

	<p>But he complained that the measure “stigmatized the automobile” and was “a bit counterproductive” since it does not distinguish between types of cars, even as the government tries to incentivize the use of electric vehicles.</p> <p>Major automakers Renault and Stellantis, which sells the Peugeot brand, and U.S. carmaker Ford, did not immediately respond to requests for comment.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 WA to distribute at-home tests, masks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/inslee-washington-state-to-distribute-millions-of-at-home-covid-tests-thousands-of-masks-amid-omicron-surge/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/inslee-washington-state-to-distribute-millions-of-at-home-covid-tests-thousands-of-masks-amid-omicron-surge/</a>
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA — Washington state will begin distributing millions of at-home coronavirus tests and masks and will expand vaccination clinics in an effort to blunt the wave of omicron cases, Gov. Jay Inslee announced Wednesday.</p> <p>The governor’s announcement in a news conference came as Washington — like other states — is engulfed in a record wave of COVID-19 cases spurred by the omicron variant.</p> <p>As state officials work to get masks and tests out in the coming days and weeks, Inslee warned residents that the surge will once again hit hospitals, where workers are burned out after nearly two years of pandemic stress.</p> <p>“We have serious concerns about our hospitals becoming overwhelmed,” Inslee said. He encouraged residents to seek medical care from their doctors rather than going straight to a hospital with any nonurgent conditions.</p> <p>The deluge of cases could well cause shortages of workers not just in hospitals but in other industries. But Inslee reiterated a commitment to making sure students receive in-person learning, saying, “We want to make sure that keeping the schools open remains our paramount obligation here.”</p> <p>To help, the state is working to expand its <a href="#">Learn to Return program</a>, a measure to help schools provide free COVID diagnostic and screen testing in an effort to help schools respond quickly to cases and avoid shutdowns. State health officials will soon publish additional guidance on that, Inslee said.</p> <p>The state is in possession of 800,000 at-home tests and expects at least 4.7 million more to arrive over the week or so, according to the governor. State health officials have purchased those from vendors for about \$50 million, said Lacy Fehrenbach, deputy secretary at the Department of Health.</p> <p>Those come on top of the 400,000 tests King County <a href="#">announced it was buying Wednesday</a>, which will give the county a total of 700,000. And the numbers announced by Inslee are in addition to any that might come from the federal government, according to the governor’s office.</p> <p>State officials plan to send 1 million of those tests to schools, and another 1 million to local health districts, in an effort to make sure tests reach underserved communities. For instance, local health departments might hand out tests at homeless shelters, Fehrenbach said at the news conference.</p> <p>Washington officials are also partnering with Amazon and CareEvolution to create a web portal that people can use to order coronavirus home tests for free. The remaining 3.5 million tests will go toward that effort.</p> <p>That web portal isn’t operational yet and isn’t expected to become live until mid-January. State officials haven’t yet decided how many tests a state resident can order at one time from that portal, according to Inslee spokesperson Mike Faulk.</p>

In the meantime, people should generally not be going to local health districts or emergency rooms looking for coronavirus tests, Fehrenbach said.

The state is also planning to distribute roughly 10 million masks — such as KN95 and surgical masks — from existing supplies. Those masks will be sent in the coming weeks to local communities through emergency management officials, as well as to K-12 schools.

The resources bring needed relief to the state's constrained supply of masks and testing kits, which have been in high demand for the past several weeks as people readied for holiday gatherings and continued omicron spread.

UW Medicine last week announced it would start [limiting coronavirus testing appointments to only people with symptoms or known exposures](#), not to asymptomatic people, because of “astronomically high” positivity rates that have slowed the testing process. Pharmacies including Walgreens, CVS and Bartell Drugs throughout December also reported [challenges in stocking at-home rapid tests](#), which continue to fly off shelves at a rate that's outpacing supply. But many drugstores still offer on-site testing.

Inslee on Wednesday also acknowledged the state's hospitalizations are “inevitably” going to rise as infections continue to spike at record levels. Although Washington's average number of COVID hospitalizations had dropped to about 60 to 70 per day in late November — after peaking at a seven-day average of 188 hospitalizations in early September — the figures are again climbing up.

As of late December — the state Department of Health's most recent complete data — Washington had recorded an average of 92 hospitalizations per day.

The state is also hoping to expand the capacity of vaccine sites to help administer more booster shots.

In Auburn, the federal mobile vaccination clinic has tripled its capacity to give shots, to 1,500 per day. Another vaccination site will be coming to Northwest Washington later this month, Inslee said, and more community health clinics are opening around the state to give shots.

National Guard soldiers are also being mustered to help at vaccine sites.

Asked Wednesday about a vaccine mandate for students, which is being considered by state health officials, Inslee said he has some concerns. He cited resistance to vaccines due to misinformation that could potentially cause parents to pull students from classes.

“It may seem absolutely a no-brainer to do this, given the fact that we're in a pandemic and this vaccine really works,” Inslee said. “But we are concerned if we ended up losing students, who wouldn't come to school because of that.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Hospitals face different kind Covid surge</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/us-hospitals-seeing-different-kind-of-covid-surge-this-time/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/us-hospitals-seeing-different-kind-of-covid-surge-this-time/</a>
GIST	<p>Hospitals across the U.S. are feeling the wrath of the omicron variant and getting thrown into disarray that is different from earlier COVID-19 surges.</p> <p>This time, they are dealing with serious staff shortages because so many health care workers are getting sick with the fast-spreading variant. People are showing up at emergency rooms in large numbers in hopes of getting tested for COVID-19, putting more strain on the system. And a surprising share of patients — two-thirds in some places — are testing positive while in the hospital for other reasons.</p> <p>At the same time, hospitals say the patients aren't as sick as those who came in during the last surge. Intensive care units aren't as full, and ventilators aren't needed as much as they were before.</p>



The pressures are nevertheless prompting hospitals to scale back non-emergency surgeries and close wards, while National Guard troops have been sent in in several states to help at medical centers and testing sites.

Nearly two years into the pandemic, frustration and exhaustion are running high among health care workers.

“This is getting very tiring, and I’m being very polite in saying that,” said Dr. Robert Glasgow of University of Utah Health, which has hundreds of workers out sick or in isolation.

About 85,000 Americans are in the hospital with COVID-19, just short of the delta-surge peak of about 94,000 in early September, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The all-time high during the pandemic was about 125,000 in January of last year.

But the hospitalization numbers do not tell the whole story. Some cases in the official count involve COVID-19 infections that weren’t what put the patients in the hospital in the first place.

Dr. Fritz François, chief of hospital operations at NYU Langone Health in New York City, said about 65% of patients admitted to that system with COVID-19 recently were primarily hospitalized for something else and were incidentally found to have the virus.

At two large Seattle hospitals over the past two weeks, three-quarters of the 64 patients testing positive for the coronavirus were admitted with a primary diagnosis other than COVID-19.

Joanne Spetz, associate director of research at the Healthforce Center at the University of California, San Francisco, said the rising number of cases like that is both good and bad.

The lack of symptoms shows vaccines, boosters and natural immunity from prior infections are working, she said. The bad news is that the numbers mean the coronavirus is spreading rapidly, and some percentage of those people will wind up needing hospitalization.

This week, 36% of California hospitals reported critical staffing shortages. And 40% are expecting such shortages.

Some hospitals are reporting as much as one quarter of their staff out for virus-related reasons, said Kiyomi Burchill, the California Hospital Association’s vice president for policy and leader on pandemic matters.

In response, hospitals are turning to temporary staffing agencies or transferring patients out.

University of Utah Health plans to keep more than 50 beds open because it doesn’t have enough nurses. It is also rescheduling surgeries that aren’t urgent. In Florida, a hospital temporarily closed its maternity ward because of staff shortages.

In Alabama, where most of the population is unvaccinated, UAB Health in Birmingham put out an urgent request for people to go elsewhere for COVID-19 tests or minor symptoms and stay home for all but true emergencies. Treatment rooms were so crowded that some patients had to be evaluated in hallways and closets.

As of Monday, New York state had just over 10,000 people in the hospital with COVID-19, including 5,500 in New York City. That’s the most in either the city or state since the disastrous spring of 2020.

New York City hospital officials, though, reported that things haven’t become dire. Generally, the patients aren’t as sick as they were back then. Of the patients hospitalized in New York City, around 600 were in ICU beds.



“We’re not even halfway to what we were in April 2020,” said Dr. David Battinelli, the physician-in-chief for Northwell Health, New York state’s largest hospital system.

Similarly, in Washington state, the number of COVID-19-infected people on ventilators increased over the past two weeks, but the share of patients needing such equipment dropped.

In South Carolina, which is seeing unprecedented numbers of new cases and a sharp rise in hospitalizations, Gov. Henry McMaster took note of the seemingly less-serious variant and said: “There’s no need to panic. Be calm. Be happy.”

Amid the omicron-triggered surge in demand for COVID-19 testing across the U.S., New York City’s Fire Department is asking people not to call for ambulance just because they are having trouble finding a test.

In Ohio, Gov. Mike DeWine announced new or expanded testing sites in nine cities to steer test-seekers away from ERs. About 300 National Guard members are being sent to help out at those centers.

In Connecticut, many ER patients are in beds in hallways, and nurses are often working double shifts because of staffing shortages, said Sherri Dayton, a nurse at the Backus Plainfield Emergency Care Center. Many emergency rooms have hours-long waiting times, she said.

“We are drowning. We are exhausted,” Dayton said.

Doctors and nurses are complaining about burnout and a sense their neighbors are no longer treating the pandemic as a crisis, despite day after day of record COVID-19 cases.

“In the past, we didn’t have the vaccine, so it was us all hands together, all the support. But that support has kind of dwindled from the community, and people seem to be moving on without us,” said Rachel Chamberlin, a nurse at New Hampshire’s Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center.

Edward Merrens, chief clinical officer at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health, said more than 85% of the hospitalized COVID-19 patients were unvaccinated.

Several patients in the hospital’s COVID-19 ICU unit were on ventilators, a breathing tube down their throats. In one room, staff members made preparations for what they feared would be the final family visit for a dying patient.

One of the unvaccinated was Fred Rutherford, a 55-year-old from Claremont, New Hampshire. His son carried him out of the house when he became sick and took him to the hospital, where he needed a breathing tube for a while and feared he might die.

If he returns home, he said, he promises to get vaccinated and tell others to do so too.

“I probably thought I was immortal, that I was tough,” Rutherford said, speaking from his hospital bed behind a window, his voice weak and shaky.

But he added: “I will do anything I can to be the voice of people that don’t understand you’ve got to get vaccinated. You’ve got to get it done to protect each other.”

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HEADLINE	01/05 US sanctions Bosnian Serb leader
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/05/us-sanctions-bosnian-serb-leader-milorad-dodik">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/05/us-sanctions-bosnian-serb-leader-milorad-dodik</a>
GIST	The US has imposed new sanctions on the Bosnian Serb leader, Milorad Dodik, a television station under his control and two other officials for “significant corruption and destabilizing activities”.

The sanctions, involving asset freezes and visa bans, follow [Dodik's threat](#) to withdraw Serbs from the Bosnian national army and other state-level institutions, potentially destroying the 1995 Dayton peace treaty and opening the way for a [return to conflict](#).

Official statements accompanying the sanctions focus on the corruption which US officials say underpin Dodik's political posturing.

"His divisive ethno-nationalistic rhetoric reflects his efforts to advance these political goals and distract attention from his corrupt activities," a [Treasury statement](#) said.

"Cumulatively, these actions threaten the stability, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of BiH and undermine the Dayton Peace Accords, thereby risking wider regional instability."

It said Dodik had handed government contracts and monopolies in the Serb-run half of Bosnia, Republika Srpska (RS) to close business associates. "With his corrupt proceeds, Dodik has engaged in bribery and additional corrupt activities to further his personal interests at the expense of citizens in the RS," the Treasury said.

Dodik has already been sanctioned in 2017, for obstruction of the Dayton accord. The new measures are wider, criminalizing financial donations to him, and targeting Alternativna Televizija, a television station based in Banja Luka, the biggest town in the RS. The channel is privately owned by a company closely linked to Dodik's family, the Treasury said, and operates as Dodik's personal propaganda outlet.

"Dodik has awarded ATV-related contracts directly to members of his family, which he has used as yet another avenue for corruption," the Treasury said. "He has funneled money directly from public companies to ATV for corrupt purposes."

Dodik shrugged off the sanctions telling a local media outlet: "If they think that they will discipline me like this, they are grossly mistaken."

A Dodik adviser, Milan Tegeltija, was also banned from entering the US. The US [secretary of state, Tony Blinken](#), said Tegeltija had used his former role as head of the state-level judiciary for "corrupt acts that included using his political influence and official power for his personal benefit".

A Bosnian Muslim, or Bosniak, party leader, Mirsad Kukić, was also targeted in Wednesday's sanction. He is accused of using his role as manager of the publicly owned Banovici mine and his seat in parliament to use "political influence and official power for his personal benefit".

Although the effect on sanctions on Dodik are reduced by his limited financial exposure in the US, Daniel Serwer, a former US special envoy to Bosnia, said they still represent a setback for Dodik.

"They do have a psychological impact. The question of how strong the financial impact is," Serwer said. "Basically this prevents designated individuals from international financial transactions, almost all of which go through the US in one fashion or another."

He added: "The sanctions, in addition to targeting Dodik and Alternativa, are a warning to other politicians and companies, who may have more to fear than Dodik."

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HEADLINE	01/05 UK BLM protesters cleared: toppling statue
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/05/four-cleared-of-toppling-edward-colston-statute">https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/05/four-cleared-of-toppling-edward-colston-statute</a>
GIST	Anti-racism campaigners have hailed a jury's decision to clear protesters responsible for toppling a statue of the slave trader Edward Colston as a huge step in getting the UK to face up to its colonial past.

Jake Skuse 33, Rhian Graham, 30, Milo Ponsford, 26, and Sage Willoughby, 22, did not dispute the roles they had played in pulling down the statue and throwing it in the River Avon during a 2020 Black Lives Matter protest but all denied criminal damage.

In closing statements following the nine-day trial, the defence had urged jurors to “be on the right side of history”, saying the statue, which stood over the city for 125 years, was so indecent and potentially abusive that it constituted a crime.

After just under three hours’ deliberation, a jury of six men and six women found the so-called “Colston Four” not guilty by an 11 to one majority decision at Bristol crown court on Wednesday afternoon.

“This verdict is a milestone in the journey that Bristol and Britain are on to come to terms with the totality of our history,” said David Olusoga, the broadcaster and historian of the slave trade, who gave evidence in the trial.

Olusoga said: “For 300 years Edward Colston was remembered as a philanthropist, his role in the slave trade and his many thousands of victims were airbrushed out of the story. The toppling of the statue and the passionate defence made in court by the Colston Four makes that deliberate policy of historical myopia now an impossibility.”

Clive Lewis, the Labour MP, said: “A British jury has confirmed the toppling of Edwards Colston’s statue was not a criminal act. The real crime was the fact the statue was still there when protesters pulled it down.

“Today’s verdict makes a compelling case that a majority of the British public want to deal with our colonial and slave trading past, not run away from it. That’s important to understand and I hope it gives political leaders a little more confidence when it comes to challenging the ‘culture war’ our government is currently pursuing.”

But some critics reacted with fury. Scott Benton, a Conservative MP, denounced the verdict as an “absolutely appalling decision”, tweeting: “Are we now a nation which ignores violent acts of criminal damage? This sends out completely the wrong message.”

The former Sun editor Kelvin MacKenzie said he could not help “questioning the sanity of the jury”. He added: “The verdict was a shocking signal to every lefty protester in the country that they can damage with impunity as long as they chant the phrase hate crime.”

After the statue was toppled, on 7 June 2020, the home secretary, Priti Patel had demanded that police pursue those responsible, saying their behaviour was “utterly disgraceful”. The Home Office did not comment following the verdicts.

The four defendants laughed with relief as the verdicts were returned. They emerged from court wearing T-shirts designed by the Bristolian street artist Banksy to raise funds for their legal fight, and hugged the many supporters waiting outside.

“This is a victory for Bristol,” Willoughby said. “This is a victory for racial equality and it’s a victory for anybody who wants to be on the right side of history.”

In the trial, in which few facts were in question, the four defendants argued that their actions were justified because the statue was so offensive.

Each defendant described being motivated by sincere antiracist conviction, frustration that previous attempts to persuade the council to remove the statue had failed, and a belief that the statue was so offensive it constituted an indecent display or a hate crime.

Colston was a 17th-century shareholder in the Royal African Company when it shipped 84,000 Africans into slavery, including 12,000 children; he rose to become the equivalent of a modern chief executive,

Olusoga had told the trial. Overall, he said, the company “transported more Africans into slavery than any other company in the whole history of the slave trade in the north Atlantic”.

The judge, Peter Blair QC, the recorder of Bristol, allowed expert evidence from Olusoga despite past comments that he “desperately” wanted to join protesters that day, which were raised as a sign of potential bias by the prosecution.

The prosecution argued that the fact Colston was a slave trader was “wholly irrelevant”. William Hughes QC, for the crown, said the case was about “cold hard facts” and the “rule of law”.

Jurors were shown CCTV capturing each of the defendants playing roles in toppling Colston. Bristol council’s head of culture, Jon Finch, gave evidence of damage to the statue, which lost a cane and part of a coattail. He confirmed £350 damage to the harbour railings and £2,400 to the pavement.

The Colston statue was approved in 1895 by the council, which had not given permission to anyone to alter, damage or remove the statue on 7 June, the trial heard.

But Liam Walker QC, representing Willoughby, said: “Each of these defendants were on the right side of history, and I submit, they were also on the right side of the law. Colston’s deeds may be historical but the continued veneration of him in this city was not. The continued veneration of him in a vibrant multicultural city was an act of abuse.”

Ponsford told jurors: “I thought that a statue that celebrates a figure such as Colston was disgraceful, and offensive to the people of Bristol.” Graham, who had also brought rope to the scene, said she had acted out of “allyship and solidarity” with people of colour.

Skuse admitted helping roll the Colston statue to Pero’s bridge (named after an enslaved man who lived in Bristol), where it was thrown into the water, “sentencing [Colston] to death”. Skuse said: “I knew I was in the right, I knew everyone wanted it down. I knew Bristol wanted it, everyone wanted the same thing.”

The court heard from black Bristolians including a former lord mayor of the city, Cleo Lake, who had removed a portrait of Colston from her office. “He was the person responsible for brutalising my ancestors, taking away their humanity, and for me and my community experiencing the harm they still experience today,” Lake said.

Responding to the verdict, Liz Hughes, chief superintendent of Avon and Somerset police, said the toppling of the statue was an incident that “attracted worldwide attention and ... polarised public opinion”, which the force had had a duty to investigate. “Having been presented with the evidence, a jury has now determined their actions were not criminal, and we respect its decision.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Calls to upgrade masks intensify: omicron</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/5/calls-upgrade-masks-intensify-omicron-spreads/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/5/calls-upgrade-masks-intensify-omicron-spreads/</a>
GIST	<p>Your cotton Hello Kitty mask is no longer going to cut it, and Sen. Rand Paul isn’t the only one saying so.</p> <p>Six months after the Kentucky Republican was suspended on YouTube for ripping cloth masks, a rising chorus of medical experts is urging Americans to upgrade their facial coverings as the highly contagious omicron variant drives coronavirus daily case counts to record U.S. highs.</p> <p>“Cloth masks aren’t going to provide a lot of protection — that’s the bottom line. This is an airborne illness,” former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Scott Gottlieb said on CBS’s “Face the Nation.” “We now understand that, and a cloth mask is not going to protect you from a virus that spreads through airborne transmission.”</p>

Even more adamant was Dr. Leana Wen, a visiting professor at the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health and an emergency room physician, who decried fabric facial coverings as practically useless.

“Cloth masks are little more than facial decorations,” Dr. Wen said last month on CNN. “There’s no place for them in light of omicron.”

What to wear instead? Dr. Wen recommended donning at a minimum a three-ply surgical mask — the disposable variety widely sold by the boxful — but better still are the respirators, starting with the gold standard, the N95.

“We’ve known for a while that wearing face masks can block the exhale of virus particles into the air around you, which helps keep the virus from spreading. And, of course, masks are also a helpful barrier when you cough or sneeze,” the Cleveland Clinic said in a Dec. 28 post. “But cloth masks, which are often made of materials like cotton, don’t do much to protect you from inhaling particles that carry the virus — and with a virus as infectious as omicron, that becomes a problem.”

In addition to the N95, the clinic recommended the KN95 (regulated by the Chinese government), and the KF94 (regulated by South Korea), but warned that about 60% of the KN95 respirators are counterfeit. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention keeps an updated list of recommended brands.

“It’s really best to find a mask that has been approved by a regulating body,” said Dr. Stephen Gordon, an infectious disease specialist at the Cleveland Clinic. “But the truth is that at the end of the day, any mask that fits closely to the face is better than a mask that doesn’t.”

A major advantage of the surgical masks and respirators is that they are made with melt-blown polypropylene, which helps trap the airborne particles.

Dr. Abraar Karan, a Stanford infectious diseases specialist and longtime advocate for high-filtration masks, said the material forms “this complex sort of webbing, which is then electrostatically charged, and that pulls the particles in when you’re inhaling and exhaling.”

“Cloth masks are often just woven thread and other materials that don’t have that design,” Dr. Karan told New York magazine in a Dec. 30 interview. “Cloth masks don’t provide great source control, either. The CDC is now letting people who test positive for COVID-19 stop isolating after five days and then wear a mask for five days. It would have been ideal for them to also recommend that [they wear] a better mask.”

Indeed, the CDC still recommends choosing masks with “two or more layers of washable, breathable fabric” in its latest guidance updated Oct. 25.

White House chief medical adviser Anthony Fauci said Sunday that surgical masks and even cotton masks are effective in preventing the spread of the omicron variant.

“Are they as effective as an N95? No,” Dr. Fauci said on CNN. “But what was being said is rather wear a cotton or a surgical mask than not wear any mask at all. And that’s the point that was made.”

“They have a degree of effectiveness. And if that’s the mask that’s available to you, use it,” he said.

Dr. Fauci and Mr. Paul, a physician, have feuded over masks and other pandemic-related issues. In August, a video in which Mr. Paul criticized the effectiveness of cloth masks was removed from YouTube and his account was suspended.

“Here’s the thing: What I said in that video is actual science,” Mr. Paul said in an August video post on Rumble. “Most of the masks you get over the counter don’t work. They don’t prevent infection. Saying cloth masks work when they don’t actually risk lives, as someone may choose to care for a loved one with COVID while only wearing a cloth mask.”

Mr. Paul, who refused to wear a mask in the Senate after recovering last year from COVID-19, added that “when it comes to N95 masks, I’ve always said that those do work.”

Even without a CDC recommendation, the move to high-filtration masks is well underway. In Connecticut, Gov. Ned Lamont announced last month plans to distribute 6 million N95 masks to residents.

“Given the highly infectious nature of the omicron variant, it is most important to wear any mask both in public spaces and when interacting in close contact with individuals outside of your household, but an N95 mask will provide better protection,” Dr. Manisha Juthani, state public health commissioner, said in a Dec. 29 statement.

The White House has begun requiring the N95. The White House Correspondents Association asked reporters in a Dec. 19 email to upgrade their masks.

“A reminder: If you must come into the White House, we ask that you please wear either an N95 or KN95 mask and avoid using cloth or surgical face coverings that do not provide a complete seal of your nose and mouth,” the message said.

The White House now requires those who interact with President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris to wear the N95, Politico reported, citing the administration’s internal COVID-19 protocols.

Capitol Hill is also embracing the respirator. The Office of the Attending Physician urged lawmakers in a Dear Colleague letter Monday to return to “maximal telework” after COVID-19 cases jumped from less than 1% to 13%.

“Blue surgical masks, cloth face masks and gaiter masks must be replaced by the more protective KN95 or N95 masks,” Capitol physician Brian Monahan said in the memo, according to media reports.

Meanwhile, the CDC has never recommended the N95 for the general public. Early in the pandemic, Dr. Fauci advised against mask-wearing for fear of shortages. He changed his recommendation months later.

“Now we have masks, and we know that you don’t need an N95 if you’re an ordinary person in the street,” Dr. Fauci told TheStreet in a June 2020 interview. “We also know that simple cloth coverings that many people have can work as well as a mask in many cases.”

Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said in January 2021 that members of the general public should not use the N95, citing the difficulty of wearing them.

“I have spent a reasonable amount of time in an N95 mask. They’re hard to tolerate all day every day,” Dr. Walensky said. “And in fact, when you really think about how well people will wear them, I worry that if, if we suggest or require that people wear an N95, they won’t wear them all the time.”

Dr. Karan said the concern about comfort was “one (of the many) excuses for why N95 and other respirators were not prioritized for scale-up with [the] Defense Production Act last year for the protection of the public.”

“It’s far less comfortable getting #covid19 and potentially infecting your family,” Dr. Karan said in a Dec. 23 tweet.

The omicron variant is behind a huge COVID-19 spike over the last several weeks, with U.S. case counts topping 1 million on Monday, according to the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center.

Death rates, however, are not rising with the case counts, and many front-line medical personnel report that the variant, while highly contagious, seems less deadly and with milder symptoms than earlier strains.

HEADLINE	01/05 Data: border no longer Mexican problem
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/5/new-dhs-data-reveals-border-no-longer-mexican-prob/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/5/new-dhs-data-reveals-border-no-longer-mexican-prob/</a>
GIST	<p>The old model of illegal immigration along the southern border was shattered in 2021, according to data released by the Department of Homeland Security this week that shows the demographics of the typical border jumper have been completely rewritten.</p> <p>Mexicans, who for decades represented the overwhelming number of illegal immigrants, dropped to 28% of the flow, their lowest share “in recorded history,” according to Customs and Border Protection. Meanwhile, the number of women and girls jumping the border soared to nearly 400,000, more than doubling the average in recent years.</p> <p>The figures were released in a belated fiscal 2021 data dump from Customs and Border Protection, which included a warning that the shifting demographics are making jobs more challenging for immigration agents.</p> <p>“This trend is important because the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) does not currently have agreements to electronically verify nationality with these different countries of origin, making removing or expelling their nationals more resource-intensive and time-consuming,” CBP said in its year-end analysis.</p> <p>Records for overall illegal activity at the border in 2021 have been apparent for months, but the new data shows CBP’s struggle to keep up with the changes.</p> <p>Migrants from the Central American countries of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador — known as the Northern Triangle — accounted for 44% of the illegal flow.</p> <p>The remaining 28% came from farther afield outside Mexico. The previous record was 14%, CBP said.</p> <p>The agency reported nabbing 388,249 women and girls, up 159% compared with the average from 2014 to 2019.</p> <p>“The rising number of women and the shift from single adults to children and family units raise different processing needs and policy responses,” the agency said.</p> <p>Todd Bensman, senior national security fellow at the Center for Immigration Studies, said blame for the surge of nontraditional migrants lies squarely at the feet of the Biden administration.</p> <p>President Biden reversed a Trump-era policy and made clear that he would not turn away illegal immigrant children traveling without parents. The result was a record-shattering 146,054 unaccompanied juveniles nabbed by agents and officers in 2021.</p> <p>The Biden team also changed policy on pregnant women. Mr. Bensman said a surge of women have shown up at the border “because they’re being let in.”</p> <p>“Aspiring and intending migrants around the world are listening very closely to who is getting let in and who is not,” he said.</p> <p>A decade or so ago, Mexicans made up about 90% of Border Patrol apprehensions at the southern border and the Northern Triangle nations accounted for 9%.</p> <p>The remaining 1% or so — about 73,000 people total from 2005 to 2010 — were from farther afield.</p> <p>CBP encountered nearly that many in a single month in September.</p> <p>In its year-end analysis, the agency didn’t guess at the reasons but acknowledged that 2021 was “challenging” because of the changing demographics.</p>



CBP said the most represented countries in that “other” category are Ecuador, Brazil, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Haiti and Cuba.

Those migrants usually pay more to smugglers.

Mexicans are typically paying \$8,000 to \$10,000 to get across the border, and Northern Triangle migrants generally are paying \$10,000 to \$12,000, according to The Washington Times’ database of smuggling prosecutions.

A Brazilian woman nabbed last month at a Border Patrol checkpoint near Laredo, Texas, said she paid \$28,000.

Adam Isacson, a border expert at the Washington Office on Latin America, said the high numbers of migrants from outside Mexico and the Northern Triangle aren’t just a blip.

“The COVID-caused regional economic depression will take years to overcome in the rest of the region. Climate change, too, may cause more people to migrate in coming years. You’ve also just got a plague of misrule with repressive or incompetent governments running their countries into the ground,” Mr. Isacson said.

The strikingly high 2021 numbers could level off thanks to the Biden team’s revival of the Trump-era “Remain in Mexico” policy for some illegal border crossers and because Mexico — “under heavy U.S. pressure,” Mr. Isacson said — has changed its policy to require a visa.

That has put a dent in the number of more well-off Brazilians and Venezuelans who fly into Mexico and then bus north to the U.S. border. Still, it does nothing to stop them from coming by land through Central America.

Mr. Isacson said the revival of Remain in Mexico and the visa policy could prove temporary.

Although the Western Hemisphere dominates the “other” category, some migrants come much farther.

The usually quiet Border Patrol sector in Del Rio, Texas, reported capturing people from 106 countries in fiscal 2021. In the last week of November alone, Del Rio agents apprehended people from Eritrea, Uzbekistan, Syria, Lebanon and Tajikistan.

Mr. Bensman said dangers are lurking inside those numbers.

The Border Patrol’s sector in Yuma, Arizona, reported arresting several men last year who appeared on watch lists or were deemed terrorism suspects.

One, arrested in December, was identified as a “potential terrorist” with ties to “Yemeni subjects of interest.” The Border Patrol identified him as Saudi, but the Saudi Arabian Embassy said the man was not a Saudi citizen.

Mr. Bensman said that encapsulates one of the problems with the surge of illegal immigrants from nontraditional countries crossing the southern border: Sometimes, it’s impossible to know who they are.

Some migrants, particularly those trying to escape their past, dump their identity documents and concoct new identities when they reach the border.

CBP hinted at the difficulty in its year-end analysis when it said it lacked agreements with many of those countries to conduct electronic identity verification.

	“It’s a confession that we don’t really know who’s coming through. It’s so easy to hide your nationality, or if you’re from the Punjab area of Pakistan and Pakistanis raise national security concerns, you just say you’re an Indian,” Mr. Bensman said.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Navy bans attaché group: China influence</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/5/inside-ring-navy-bans-work-attache-group-over-chin/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/5/inside-ring-navy-bans-work-attache-group-over-chin/</a>
GIST	<p>Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro has banned the Navy from taking part in activities of the semi-official Naval Attache Association over concerns that China is manipulating the group.</p> <p>The secretary issued a memo to all Navy personnel Dec. 21 expressing concerns that China is using coercion and censorship for unspecified purposes within the non-governmental organization that caters to foreign navy attaches.</p> <p>Mr. Del Toro stated in the memo that the Navy regards the group as important to promoting engagement with foreign naval attaches, work he described as “of paramount importance to our international engagement and cooperation,” and to advancing both strategic and operational Pentagon and Navy interests.</p> <p>“However, recent actions by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) have complicated the department’s ability to utilize the Naval Attache Association (NAA) as a forum to facilitate partners’ access to senior [Department of Navy] leadership,” he said. “The department does not support PRC coercive tactics and censorship and will always oppose such efforts to manipulate independent organizations and actors.”</p> <p>The ban makes all NAA-sponsored or -hosted activities off limits.</p> <p>A Navy official said the ban followed a Chinese attempt to influence the organization.</p> <p>“The department became aware of a campaign by the PRC to influence a board vote affecting the inclusivity of the NAA organization,” the official said without elaborating.</p> <p>Navy military and civilian employees will continue to meet and engage with the corps of foreign naval attaches outside of the forum, Mr. Del Toro said. Foreign military attaches, typically a high-ranking officer in the country’s armed services, serve with diplomatic privileges in a host country while retaining their military commission.</p> <p>Navy spokesmen did not immediately respond to requests for comments or for details on the Chinese activities that inspired the ban.</p> <p>A spokeswoman for the NAA referred questions about the ban to the group’s chairman, Spanish Navy Capt. Pablo Murga Gomez. Mr. Gomez did not respond to an email request for comment. A spokesman for the Chinese Embassy also did not respond to an email request for comment.</p> <p>The NAA website showed several events involving Navy officials as speakers had been canceled.</p> <p>The NAA website says the goal of the Arlington-based group is to advance mutual understanding of maritime security affairs and to boost relationships.</p> <p>“The NAA will foster strong relationships among its membership and their families, and with U.S. Department of Defense’s sea services, and other relevant U.S. government and non-government agencies through an active program of engagements,” the mission statement says.</p> <p>As with other nations, including the United States, China uses its embassy-based military attaches for intelligence-gathering.</p>

In December 2019, two Chinese Embassy officials were expelled from the United States for attempting to enter a sensitive U.S. military base near Norfolk that is used by Navy special operations forces. The incident took place in September 2019 and involved a group of Chinese diplomats and their wives who ran past the gate at the base and evaded military police until they were stopped with fire trucks that blocked their way.

Officials at the time said the intrusion was a classic case of Chinese military intelligence-gathering.

### **Pentagon to report on athletes at Wuhan military games**

The Pentagon must report to Congress in the next several months on the health of hundreds of U.S. military troops who took part in the World Military Games in Wuhan, China — held just weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic first broke out in the city in late 2019.

A section of the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act gives the Pentagon six months to report to the Senate and House whether there were any illnesses among the U.S. military personnel who participated as athletes in Wuhan.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said that the Defense Department has no evidence of cases of COVID-19 among the returning military athletes.

“The department has made clear in the past that we have no knowledge of COVID infections among U.S. troops participating in the 2019 World Military Games,” Mr. Kirby said in a statement. “Indeed, there is no evidence that any U.S. military personnel were infected prior to the U.S. government implementing travel restrictions following China’s acknowledgment of the COVID-19 outbreak.”

But Mr. Kirby added that “we fully support ongoing investigative efforts into the origins of COVID-19 — efforts that would, of course, benefit from full transparency by Chinese authorities.”

A defense official told “Inside the Ring” that the Pentagon will comply with the new law requiring the Wuhan report. According to the law signed by President Biden last month, the report must include the number of U.S. athletes and staff who took part in the games and became ill with COVID-19 like symptoms during or shortly after returning to the United States.

Congress also wants to know if any blood tests were carried out on the traveling military athletes and if any samples showed signs of COVID infection. Also included in the report will be the number of home station Pentagon facilities of the athletes who attended and whether the bases experienced subsequent outbreaks of the deadly virus.

The report, which must also be produced in an unclassified format, will also include whether tests for COVID antibodies were conducted on the returning athletes and disclose whether defense or military inspector generals have investigated any links between the World Games athletes in Wuhan and the disease outbreak.

Several military athletes from other countries who took part in the World Military Games claimed to have come down with flu-like symptoms suspected of being COVID-19 during and after the gathering.

Chinese officials have cited the illnesses linked to the Wuhan World Military Games to promote what U.S. officials say is a false narrative that the COVID-19 virus and subsequent pandemic was brought to China by U.S. military personnel.

“It might be U.S. Army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan” during the games, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, one of China’s so-called “wolf warrior” diplomats, said on Twitter in 2020.

The claim that the United States brought the virus to Wuhan has been denied repeatedly by Washington.

The origin of the virus remains unconfirmed. However, the first reported case of what Chinese authorities called at the time the “Wuhan pneumonia” appeared in December 2019. A January State Department fact sheet said U.S. intelligence indicated that workers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, one suspected source for the initial disease outbreak, became ill with COVID-like symptoms the month before.

U.S. intelligence agencies, in an unclassified assessment made public last year, said the virus began “no later than November 2019” with first known cases in Wuhan in December.

The spy agency assessment said Chinese officials did not have advanced knowledge of the virus before the initial outbreak.

A security study by a private intelligence firm stated that in October 2019 the Wuhan Institute of Virology appeared to lose all cell phone connectivity, perhaps indicating some type of incident at the laboratory that was conducting research involving making bat coronaviruses more infectious to humans.

Rep. Mike Gallagher, Wisconsin Republican, sought answers to questions about the military games in a letter to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in June. Mr. Gallagher said an estimated 280 U.S. military personnel took part in the event in Wuhan from Oct. 18 to 28 in Wuhan.

Military athletes from France, Italy, Germany, Sweden and Luxembourg may have become sick with COVID-like symptoms at the games, he said. French pentathlete Elodie Clouvel reportedly got sick during the games and was later told by a military doctor she may have had contracted the new virus, he stated.

“One athlete from Luxembourg reported ‘nearly empty’ streets in Wuhan during the Games, recalling, ‘It was a ghost town’ and ‘There were rumors that the government warned the inhabitants not to go out,’” Mr. Gallagher stated.

A spokeswoman for Mr. Gallagher said the congressman so far has not received a response to the letter.

Sen. Roger Marshall, Kansas Republican, also requested that the HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra investigate the military athletic meet as a possible origin point for the pandemic.

“The World Military Games’ proximity to the [Wuhan Institute of Virology] and the new details of the athletes potentially being exposed to COVID-19 while participating in the event present an alarming coincidence our government must investigate to establish an accurate timeline of the outbreak,” Mr. Marshall stated in a letter.

The senator asked HHS officials to look into whether U.S. participants in the games showed signs of COVID-19 or whether participants may have tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Half of states raising minimum wage 2022</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/5/half-us-states-raising-minimum-wage-2022/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/5/half-us-states-raising-minimum-wage-2022/</a>
GIST	<p>Entry-level workers across much of the country will see bigger paychecks in 2022 as 25 states and the District of Columbia phase in higher minimum wage laws throughout the year.</p> <p>Most of those 26 jurisdictions have bumped the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 for non-tipped workers, which hasn’t been increased since 2009, to \$10 an hour or more.</p> <p>The new laws took effect in 20 states on Jan. 1; another three states will hike the rate on July 1 and the last state, Florida, will do so on Sept. 30. New York raised its minimum wage from \$12.50 to \$13.20 on Dec. 31.</p>

Brian Marks, who teaches economics at the University of New Haven, said the hikes continue a 2021 “trend of legislatively scheduled state minimum wage increases” above the federal minimum wage for non-exempt employees.

But he said the hikes, intended to secure a living wage and incentivize people to seek jobs during the current worker shortage, may prove ineffective since the supply chain crisis and other pandemic factors have already led many employers to raise their minimum wage well above the new state targets.

“Most entry-level workers are already earning more than the minimum wage because employers are having to pay more during the pandemic to fill open positions,” Mr. Marks said. “For example, many fast-food restaurants are either already paying their employees above the minimum wage or are purchasing equipment like self-serve fountain drink machines to eliminate employees.”

In 48 states, the percentage of workers making the local minimum is less than 2.8%, even in places where it is indexed for inflation. The two exceptions are Louisiana and South Carolina, where 3.4% and 4.4% of their respective workers earn minimum wage.

Hans Dau, a supply chain analyst who runs the Mitchell Madison Group business consulting firm, said the increases will not affect many workers in most U.S. markets for this reason.

“Minimum wage laws are largely political theater as less than 1.5% of U.S. workers work at the minimum wage level,” Mr. Dau said. “There are few markets where minimum wage is a factor, and those probably employ much of the well over 5% of the workforce that is in the U.S. illegally.”

Virginia hiked its minimum wage from \$9.50 to \$11 on Saturday — the largest increase in the nation this year.

Maryland also on Saturday raised its minimum wage from \$11.75 in 2021 to \$12.50, the second year in a row that it upped hourly worker pay by 75 cents.

California began the new year by raising the state’s minimum wage from \$14 to \$15 — the highest minimum wage outside of the District of Columbia.

Four other states raised their minimum wages by at least \$1 for 2022: Delaware, by \$1.25 to \$10.50 per hour, while Illinois, New Jersey and New Mexico raised their minimum wages by \$1 to \$12, \$13 and \$11.50, respectively.

Rick Manning, president of the Fairfax, Virginia-based Americans for Limited Government, said the hikes could lead some businesses to hire more experienced workers than young people for entry-level work.

“It’s an attack on young people and their ability to learn how to work,” Mr. Manning said. “In today’s economic environment where small businesses are struggling for survival with supply chain difficulties, the government raising the cost of labor will kill some businesses, put some employees who aren’t deemed worthy of the increased wages out of work, and increase automation like self-serve checkouts at Walmart and the grocery store.”

A former chief of staff for public affairs in the U.S. Department of Labor under President George W. Bush, Mr. Manning noted that thousands of workers on the lower end of the wage scale lost their jobs in Seattle after the city passed a law in 2014 that gradually raised the minimum wage for companies with more than 500 employees from \$9 to \$15 last year.

“We know that in Seattle, the city council raised the minimum wage with the expectation that workers would receive a significant pay increase,” Mr. Manning said. “Instead, a lot of restaurants paid the best-performing employees more than \$15 an hour and laid off the worst-performing employees.”

On Jan. 2, 2020, Kate Rogers and Nick Wells reported for CNBC that the Seattle wage hike had left businesses shorthanded even before the pandemic, as employees opted to work fewer hours as their wages rose in a tight labor market.

At that time, CNBC noted that Democratic Party presidential candidates Bernard Sanders and Joseph R. Biden both advocated raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour — a legislative wish the U.S. Congress has yet to fulfill.

But President Biden issued an executive order in April to raise the minimum wage for federal contract workers to \$15 an hour, a rule that takes effect Jan. 30.

The National Employment Law Project reports that 56 municipalities are also raising the minimum wage this year.

Mayor Muriel Bowser has announced that the District of Columbia will increase its minimum wage to \$16.10, among the highest in the nation, on July 1.

On Jan. 1, West Hollywood, California raised the minimum wage for its hotel workers to \$17.64 an hour, the highest in the country.

The other states that raised their minimum wages, effective Saturday, were Missouri (\$11.15, an 85-cent increase), Vermont (\$12.55, an 80-cent increase), Washington (\$14.49, an 80-cent increase), Massachusetts (\$14.25, a 75-cent increase), Rhode Island (\$12.25, a 75-cent increase), Arizona (\$12.80, a 65-cent increase), Maine (\$12.75, a 60-cent increase), South Dakota (\$9.95, a 50-cent increase), Ohio (\$9.30, a 50-cent increase), Montana (\$9.20, a 45-cent increase), Minnesota (\$10.33, a 25-cent increase), Colorado \$12.56, a 24-cent increase), and Michigan (\$9.87, a 22-cent increase).

On July 1, Connecticut will raise its minimum wage by \$1 to \$14 per hour while Nevada and Oregon increase theirs by 75 cents to \$9.50 and \$13.50 per hour, respectively.

Florida will be the last state this year to increase its minimum wage, upping it by \$1 to \$11 per hour on Sept. 30.

Twenty-one states including Texas, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Utah have still not raised their minimum wage above the \$7.25 federal rate.

Five of these states — Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee — have not adopted a separate minimum wage. The federal minimum wage of \$7.25 applies there as well as in Georgia and Wyoming, which still have state minimum wages below the federal level.

Christine McDaniel, a senior fellow at George Mason University's Mercatus Center free-market think tank, said many businesses will respond to this year's minimum wage hikes by either raising prices on customers or reducing work hours

"Overall, the empirical evidence on the employment effects of increasing the minimum wage is mixed at best," said Ms. McDaniel, a former U.S. Treasury deputy assistant secretary.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Covid hospitalizations among children soar
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/05/covid-hospitalizations-us-children-omicron-schools-hospitals">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/05/covid-hospitalizations-us-children-omicron-schools-hospitals</a>
GIST	Covid-19 hospitalizations among children in the US are soaring, fueled by the <a href="#">Omicron variant</a> and the holidays, and adding pressure to already-strained health systems and schools.

An average of [672 children](#) were being hospitalized every day in the US, as of 2 January - more than double the average just a week before. And the rate is rapidly increasing.

Cases are also rising. There were more than 325,000 new cases among kids in the week ending 23 December, a 64% increase from the previous week and nearly double the cases two weeks earlier, the American Academy of Pediatrics [reported](#) on Monday.

The increases [appear to be driven](#) by the more contagious nature of the Omicron variant and low vaccination rates among children over the age of five years old. As with adults, early evidence appears to show that Omicron also largely causes mild illness in kids.

Nonetheless, experts are urging the use of every possible precaution, including tests, masks, vaccinations and even temporary delays in reopening schools to curb both cases and staff shortages.

“We have about four times as many children admitted currently as we have had in any other wave,” Dr Elaine Cox, the chief medical officer for Riley Children’s Health in Indiana, told reporters on Tuesday. They are also seeing the severity rise among the children who are admitted to the hospital, Cox said. “So there are more of them, and they are sicker.”

More than half the hospitalized children have had to spend time in the intensive care unit, and at least 40% of those kids need to be put on a ventilator, she said.

More than 1,000 kids have [died](#) in the US from Covid during the pandemic so far, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). More than 830,000 people have died in the US from Covid so far.

In New York, hospitalizations among kids [quadrupled](#). In Washington DC, children’s hospital admissions have roughly [doubled](#). In Texas, children’s hospitalizations were described as “[staggering](#)”. In Alabama, cases were “[like a rocket ship](#)”. In Louisiana, one doctor said: “[We’ve never seen anything like it](#).” In Ohio, one associate professor of internal medicine and pediatrics critical care recently told ABC news: “[We’re on fire](#).”

Hospitals are shooting past the peaks of previous surges, many of them driven by the Omicron variant. In South Africa, children and teens accounted for [17%](#) of hospital admissions during the Omicron wave, compared to 4% during the second wave and 3.5% during the third, which was fueled by the Delta variant.

Cox said she had also seen a sharp uptick in cases among pregnant people and newborns.

In addition to Covid, hospitals are also seeing a dangerous wave of RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) and the flu this year, creating a triple threat of respiratory illness.

At the same time, health workers are also getting breakthrough infections with Omicron, creating staff shortages. “We have significant numbers of our staff who are becoming ill with Covid, so they can’t work,” Cox said. Indiana is one of the states calling in the national guard to help with hospital care and logistics.

School systems across the country are also balancing soaring cases, among students and staff, and weighing [virtual options](#). Leaders of Chicago public schools, the country’s third-largest school network, canceled classes on Wednesday after the teachers’ union voted to switch to remote learning due to the surge in Covid cases.

In late December, Joe Biden [urged](#) the widespread use of tools to combat the virus, including tests and vaccines. “We can keep our K-through-12 schools open, and that’s exactly what we should be doing,” he said.



In Washington DC, which has some of the highest rates of Covid in the country, all students and staff are now [required](#) to take a rapid test before returning to school – one of the few districts in the country with this requirement.

But schools in neighboring Montgomery county, Maryland, which has also been hit hard with new cases and hospitalizations, are recommending, not requiring, tests for students and staff. Tests have been difficult to find in many places.

“We have tools now that we didn’t have last year, that will allow us to keep schools open if we deploy those tools in the best possible way,” said Brian Castrucci, who is the president and CEO of the de Beaumont Foundation, a former state and local health official, and the parent to school-aged kids in Montgomery county.

“We’re dealing with trying to make sure that schools are operational, that there are enough bus drivers, there are enough teachers,” Castrucci said.

Educators and health officials worry that a return to school during a time of unprecedented spread could lead to the involuntary closure of schools due to staff shortages and contribute to rising cases, especially in places that aren’t able or willing to institute precautions.

“It is mind-boggling some states have a [mask] mandate ban, or do not do enough to keep our kids safe,” said Tony Yang, executive director of the Center for Health Policy and Media Engagement at George Washington University, who has [researched](#) mask mandates in schools.

Yang strongly favors in-person school with precautions in place. “Students should go to school in person,” he said. “But you have to do that safely.”

In places where cases are particularly high, even where some precautions are in place, schools could choose to extend winter break to avoid staff shortages during the worst of the January peak, Castrucci said.

“The number one thing is, we have to use every resource we have to keep kids in school in person over the long term,” he said. “And right now, we have to make a risk calculation as to whether this is the right moment to bring kids back from the holiday.”

Vaccines are another key tool, said Diego Hijano, a pediatric infectious disease doctor at St Jude children’s research hospital in Memphis, Tennessee.

“Vaccination matters in terms of hospitalization and outcomes,” he said. Most of the hospitalized kids around the country are unvaccinated, and Hijano had not seen a vaccinated child hospitalized for Covid – even though he works with many children who are at risk because of other medical conditions.

Hospitals overwhelmed by Covid can lead to worse care and outcomes for children suffering from other causes, he said.

“If a kid has appendicitis and needs a bed for the surgery, they may not get it because the hospital is flooded with Covid,” Hijano said.

“As a country and society, we shouldn’t allow even one death that could be prevented.”

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HEADLINE	01/05 France anger over president’s rebuke
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/05/macron-rebuke-to-unvaccinated-citizens-incurs-anger-in-parliament">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/05/macron-rebuke-to-unvaccinated-citizens-incurs-anger-in-parliament</a>
GIST	Emmanuel Macron faced criticism from political opponents and heated scenes in parliament on Wednesday after he gave a <a href="#">deliberately provocative warning</a> to unvaccinated French people, saying he

would make their lives as difficult as possible by curbing their access to spaces such as cafés and restaurants.

A crucial parliamentary debate on introducing a proposed Covid-19 “vaccine pass” for entry to areas such as museums and long-distance trains was to resume on Wednesday afternoon.

The debate had been suspended just before 2am on Wednesday as lawmakers expressed outrage at Macron’s newspaper interview in which he said the 5 million people who had not had vaccines against the coronavirus were “irresponsible” and that he really wanted to “put them in the shit” by making their daily lives as complicated as possible.

The French government spokesman, Gabriel Attal, warned there would be a “supersonic” rise in Covid cases in [France](#) in the coming days and that infections were reaching stratospheric levels in the Île-de-France area around Paris as well as some in other regions.

He said the situation in hospitals could worsen in the coming weeks. On Wednesday, France registered a record number of 335,000 infections over the previous 24 hours.

The government, in a hardening of current rules, is seeking to make it mandatory for people to show proof of Covid-19 vaccination to enter cafés, restaurants, museums, cinemas and theatres, or to use long-distance trains. Repeated [disruptions](#) and clashes in parliament, as well as hundreds of proposed amendments, are leaving the government struggling to push the law through before its deadline of 15 January.

In an interview with readers of [Le Parisien](#) newspaper published on Wednesday, Macron, the French president, deliberately used the verb “emmerder”, which is derived from the word “merde” or “shit” and is widely used in France and considered vulgar slang. He said that he “really wanted” to put the non-vaccinated “in the shit” by making their lives very complicated and “limiting as much as possible their access to activities in social life”.

Macron said: “We have to tell [the unvaccinated] ... you will no longer be able to go to a restaurant, you will no longer be able to go for a coffee, you will no longer be able to go to the theatre, you will no longer be able to go to the cinema. We will continue to do this, to the end. This is the strategy.” He explained that he could not force French people to get vaccinated on pain of prison or fines but life could be made very difficult for them without a vaccine.

In parliament, opposition parties slammed Macron’s choice of language as unfit for a president and worrying in terms of voting through the new law.

Christian Jacob, president of the opposition, rightwing Les Républicains party, told parliament: “A president cannot say such things ... I’m in favour of the vaccine pass but I cannot back a text whose objective is to put French people in the shit.”

Damien Abad, from the same party, slammed what he called unworthy, irresponsible and premeditated remarks which showed “childish cynicism”.

On the left, there was outrage over more of Macron’s comments, when, referring to unvaccinated people, he said that when some people’s freedom threatened those of others they became irresponsible, adding: “Someone irresponsible is not a citizen.”

Mathilde Panot, head of the parliamentary group for the left’s La France Insoumise party, told the house: “We won’t keep debating a text you presented as a protection of the French people and which is in fact a text to put a part of the French population in the shit and which has invented [the notion of] stripping French citizenship – by saying irresponsible people are no longer French citizens.”

Macron is expected to seek re-election in the presidential elections this April. However, his key challenger, Valérie Pécresse, of Les Républicains, told French TV that he was dividing the nation by making some citizens seem better than others.

“It’s not up to the president of the republic to pick out good and bad French people,” Pécresse said. France needed a government to “unite people and calm things down”, she added.

But government figures and Macron allies stood by the president’s calculated choice of words and the strategy to make daily life very hard for unvaccinated people.

Macron is no stranger to rows over off-the-cuff comments or slang, telling interviewers last month that he regretted some of his comments of the past five years, saying: “I’ve learned to have a lot more respect for everyone.”

But the vehemence of his comments about unvaccinated people and his deliberate choice of hard language was aimed at his own electorate, which is almost entirely vaccinated, and it was also a pre-election message to address the widespread exasperation at the Covid crisis in France.

Although France has historically had more vaccine sceptics than many of its neighbours, it has one of the highest Covid-19 vaccination rates in the EU. A majority of people is in favour of vaccination; about 90% of French people aged 12 and over are vaccinated.

The number of unvaccinated people in French hospital critical wards is higher than those who are vaccinated, and the health minister has said that the small minority of unvaccinated people in France, numbering around 5 million, is too many.

Christophe Castaner, a key Macron ally and head of his grouping in parliament, said: “The president’s comments gave clarity, and we need that at this difficult moment for the country.” Castaner said that the president was giving a view that lots of French people shared.

Olivier Véran, the health minister, told parliament the aim of Macron’s entire interview was “the protection of the French people”.

Marc Fesneau, minister for parliamentary relations, said: “We need unvaccinated people to hear the message being sent to them by the government, parliament and the president – which is a message of responsibility.”

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HEADLINE	01/05 Seattle police faked Proud Boys threat
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-police-improperly-faked-radio-chatter-about-proud-boys-as-chop-formed-in-2020-investigation-finds/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-police-improperly-faked-radio-chatter-about-proud-boys-as-chop-formed-in-2020-investigation-finds/</a>
GIST	<p>At a crucial moment during 2020’s racial justice protests, Seattle police exchanged a detailed series of fake radio transmissions about a nonexistent group of menacing right-wing extremists.</p> <p>The radio chatter about members of the Proud Boys marching around downtown Seattle, some possibly carrying guns, and then heading to confront protesters on Capitol Hill was an improper “ruse,” or dishonest ploy, that exacerbated a volatile situation, according to <a href="#">findings</a> released Wednesday by the city’s Office of Police Accountability.</p> <p>The Proud Boys is a far-right group with a reputation for street violence and with several members — including one from South King County — who have been charged with terrorism for alleged actions related to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.</p>

The ruse happened on the night of June 8, 2020, hours after the Police Department had abandoned its East Precinct on Capitol Hill and just as protesters were starting to set up the zone that was later called the Capitol Hill Organized Protest, or CHOP.

The officers who participated described a group gathering by City Hall and moving around downtown. They delivered reports such as, “It looks like a few of them might be open carrying,” and: “Hearing from the Proud Boys group. ... They may be looking for somewhere else for confrontation.”

Social media posts warning about the Proud Boys by people who were monitoring police radio transmissions caused alarm in the protest zone, where some people armed and barricaded themselves that night. Though some people in the zone may have brought guns regardless of the chatter, the ruse “improperly added fuel to the fire,” OPA Director Andrew Myerberg concluded.

In the ensuing days, police leaders raised concerns about reports of armed people patrolling the zone and extorting business owners. Those leaders, including then-Police Chief Carmen Best, later walked back the extortion claim, lacking evidence. But photos and descriptions of the scene became national news, even reaching then-President Donald Trump, who threatened to “take back” the city.

The June 8 chatter about Proud Boys was part of an approved “misinformation effort” via radio that multiple police leaders knew about, according to Wednesday’s closed-case summary by Myerberg, which will be reviewed by interim police Chief Adrian Diaz for disciplinary rulings. Fabricating the group of Proud Boys as part of the effort violated department policies, Myerberg determined.

But it appears unlikely that anyone will lose their jobs or pay over the incident. The two employees who ordered and supervised the misinformation effort and who Myerberg sustained allegations of policy violations against have already left the department, according to the case summary.

Myerberg didn’t sustain allegations of policy violations against four officers identified as having taken part in the Proud Boys chatter. The officers used poor judgment, but their supervisors were mostly to blame for failing to provide adequate supervision, Myerberg determined.

The Proud Boys ruse was deployed at an incredibly tense moment. The murder of George Floyd had sparked more than a week of large-scale protests in Seattle, with the police barricading streets around the East Precinct and deploying tear gas. Later in June, two fatal shootings occurred in the CHOP zone.

Matt Watson, a Seattle artist and activist known as “Spek,” immediately raised the possibility [on social media](#) that there had been a hoax. No one out on the streets had actually seen the Proud Boys group that the officers were talking about on the radio, and the officers were using irregular call signs.

But there was no investigation until late 2020, when Converge Media journalist Omari Salisbury asked OPA for body camera video from the officers who had supposedly tailed the Proud Boys group. When OPA couldn’t locate any relevant video, the office launched an investigation.

The investigation was completed by September 2021; several months passed before Myerberg issued findings. The case was less of a priority than some others that involved recommendations of discipline against current employees, Myerberg said. The city’s contract with the union that represents officers prohibits discipline in investigations that take more than 180 days.

Salisbury, whose questions spurred the OPA investigation and who pressed for the findings to be released, said he wants the public to know what had occurred. It’s been 18 months since the Proud Boys ruse happened.

“It’s important that everything about the protests comes out and until that occurs we can’t move forward and heal,” Salisbury said, noting that new Mayor Bruce Harrell has talked about trying to bring city together. “We can’t be one Seattle until we resolve these issues.”

Watson, who posted audio from the Proud Boys ruse [on social media](#) after someone sent him a recording from the website openmhz.com, contends the ruse was part of a wider attempt by the police to undermine the protests.

“Having a counterinsurgency operation conducted by our local police department in our own community is bonkers,” especially given that the officers weaponized a group later involved in the Capitol attack, Watson said.

In a statement Wednesday, Harrell said the ruse had done “immeasurable” damage to public trust.

“Misinformation, especially of this inflammatory nature, is totally unacceptable from our Seattle police officers,” he said. “This kind of tactic never should have been considered.”

The Police Department had been cited for an improper ruse [before](#), said Councilmember Lisa Herbold, noting a 2019 [recommendation for better training](#) has been only partially implemented.

### **The investigation**

The OPA contacted the department’s operations center and intelligence unit and learned there had been a miscommunication effort approved, ordered and led by a captain who later became an assistant chief and then left the department.

Myerberg’s case summary doesn’t name any of the people involved, referring to the captain as “Named Employee #1.” But the description of Named Employee #1 applies to Bryan Grenon, who was captain of the East Precinct, became an assistant chief and has since left.

In an interview with OPA, Grenon said he came up with the misinformation effort because he knew people were monitoring police radio transmissions. He said the idea was to give them the impression that “we had more officers out there doing regular stuff.”

Grenon said he didn’t seek approval from Best or Assistant Chief of Patrol Operations Tom Mahaffey for the misinformation effort.

He said misinformation was used on June 8 in particular because “we were overrun with, you know, forces or protesters.” An aim was to separate them and “get them into other areas.” Grenon didn’t know until later that the officers had decided to discuss a fictitious group of Proud Boys, he told OPA.

An operations center officer labeled “Named Employee #2” told OPA he was assigned by Grenon to carry out the misinformation effort by organizing some officers to “focus some attention on a location different than where the main police and protest interactions were happening.” He said he didn’t remember the Proud Boys ruse but also didn’t consider it inappropriate. The aim was to “make the broadcast seem realistic” rather than to “incite fear,” he said.

In a second interview with OPA, Grenon said the use of the Proud Boys was contrary to his guidance to Named Employee #2 and said the point of the misinformation effort was to protect officers from being ambushed.

Reached Wednesday by phone, Grenon said he was looking for “an innocent way to just throw out some distraction” at a time when the Police Department was short-handed and under pressure.

He said the effort was meant to target people intent on harming officers, drawing a distinction between those people and regular protesters.

“It was never my intent to cause alarm,” he said, attributing the Proud Boys ruse to officers who got carried away.

“Hindsight is 20/20,” Grenon said.

An officer who was involved in other aspects of the misinformation effort but not the Proud Boys ruse said the effort lasted for multiple days and mostly involved mundane chatter, like what officers were going to eat that day.

OPA interviewed three of four officers who were identified as having participated in the Proud Boys ruse. They said they weren't given specific instructions, other than to divide the attention of the protesters.

Best told OPA she didn't know about the effort. Mahaffey told OPA he was generally aware but wasn't involved. He said his understanding was that the effort was supposed to lure protesters away from the East Precinct, allowing the police to reoccupy the building.

Mahaffey didn't know at the time that the Proud Boys would be referenced but believes the use of a ruse was justified, he told OPA.

"We simply cannot have a chief or command staff claim that they are unaware of such critical tactical decisions. ... This cannot happen again, period," Harrell said Wednesday, promising to meet with Diaz about the matter.

Herbold said she would have expected more oversight from someone like Mahaffey.

### **The findings**

Wednesday's case summary includes the Proud Boys transmissions until 10:14 p.m. The chatter continued past midnight, according to a recording shared by Watson, with officers describing the Proud Boys moving from downtown to First Hill in an attempt to reach Capitol Hill.

At one point, an officer said, "I haven't seen any long weapons. There might be one carry — one sidearm on a holster," describing the group as "very boisterous tonight."

At another point, the same officer reported a fight brewing between the Proud Boys and another group. He said officers had detained one person and later said he was going to confiscate "sticks, makeshift weapons."

The same officer later estimated that the group was 20 to 30 people, saying the Proud Boys were going to head east, toward Cal Anderson Park, near the East Precinct.

According to Myerberg, Grenon and Named Employee #2 violated the department's policies on discretion and truthfulness.

The effort lacked adequate guidelines (officers said they weren't told what to say or not say), was inadequately supervised (officers said they'd never participated in a similar effort before) and was inadequately documented (there was no after-action report, no list of who participated and no official recording made), Myerberg concluded.

Police are allowed to use a ruse only when undercover, to acquire information for a criminal investigation or to address "an exigent threat to life safety or public safety." Even then, state law says a ruse can't be so "shocking" as to violate "fundamental fairness." None of those conditions applied to the Proud Boys chatter, Myerberg determined.

"While anger and emotion were high" in the CHOP that night, "there was no ongoing violence within the zone or imminent violence that could have been reasonably foreseen," he wrote.

Had the officers only discussed innocuous topics, such as movies or meals, that would have been acceptable, Myerberg wrote.

	“The use of the Proud Boys when it was known that the transmissions would be monitored took a volatile situation and made it even more so,” Myerberg wrote, arguing it was reasonably foreseeable that the CHOP protesters would be worried and would “take steps to arm and defend themselves.”
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Russia-allied military forces to Kazakhstan</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/world/europe/kazakhstan-protests-gas-prices.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/world/europe/kazakhstan-protests-gas-prices.html</a>
GIST	<p>MOSCOW — A Russian-led military alliance said late Wednesday that it would send peacekeeping forces to Kazakhstan at the invitation of the country’s president to help put down a growing protest movement there.</p> <p>The current chairman of the alliance, the Armenian prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, said in <a href="#">a statement</a> that the troops would be stationed there only “for a limited time period,” until order could be restored.</p> <p>He did not elaborate on how many soldiers could be mobilized or how long they might stay. Russia is notorious for sending in troops under the guise of peacekeeping missions that go on to establish a permanent presence in the host countries.</p> <p>The Kazakh president, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, issued the invitation earlier in the evening. Calling the demonstrators “a band of international terrorists,” he said he was turning to Russia’s version of NATO, called the Collective Security Treaty Organization, to “help Kazakhstan overcome this terrorist threat.”</p> <p>The revolt began on Sunday in western Kazakhstan as a protest against a surge in fuel prices. Four days later, with government buildings, TV stations, the airport and numerous businesses stormed by thousands of anti-government protesters, the uprising has expanded into a full-throated attack on an entrenched Kazakh elite widely reviled as autocratic and corrupt.</p> <p>On Thursday, a police spokeswoman said dozens of people had been killed by the authorities when they tried to storm government buildings, police headquarters and district police offices, the first widespread fatalities involving protesters since the demonstrations started. That announcement came after earlier reports in the local news media that the police had opened fire on demonstrators in the oil city of Atyrau, killing at least one person.</p> <p>Footage posted online on Wednesday showed thousands of people storming the main government building in the country’s largest city, Almaty.</p> <p>Smoke billowed from the building that afternoon as the crowd began to disperse. The regional branch of the governing Nur Otan party was also set on fire, local news outlets reported, as was the former presidential residence.</p> <p>News services reported renewed clashes between protesters and the police, who used stun grenades and tear gas to quell the crowd. Protesters also set fire to the prosecutor’s office in Almaty before heading for the president’s residence.</p> <p>The Almaty police said that protesters burned 120 cars, including 33 police vehicles, and damaged about 400 businesses, and that more than 200 had been detained. The country’s Internal Affairs Ministry said that eight members of law enforcement had died in the clashes.</p> <p>The protests began peacefully Sunday in the oil town of Zhanaozen, after the government doubled the cost of liquefied petroleum gas — used to fuel vehicles in Kazakhstan — to about 100 tenge, or 22 cents, per liter. By the time the government announced on Tuesday that it would rescind the price increase, the protests had spread across the country, with broader demands for increased political representation and improved social benefits.</p>



Apparently unsatisfied by an announcement early Wednesday that the entire government would be sacked and that new parliamentary elections were possible, protesters took control of the country's main airport.

The protests reverberated across the continent to Moscow, where President Vladimir V. Putin was forced to witness another uprising against an authoritarian, Kremlin-aligned nation, following pro-democracy protests in Ukraine in 2014 and in Belarus in 2020.

The protests represent a warning signal for the Kremlin, said Arkady Dubnov, a Central Asia expert in Moscow, describing the government in Kazakhstan as "a reduced replica of the Russian one."

He added: "There is no doubt that the Kremlin would not want to see an example of such a regime beginning to talk to the opposition and conceding to their demands."

The timing is particularly awkward for Mr. Putin, who hopes to use three meetings next week with Western delegations to renegotiate post-Cold War international security agreements on Ukraine and what Russia considers its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The revolt also seemed to mark a decisive break with the rule of Kazakhstan's former president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who stepped down as president in 2019 but had still kept a hand in the country's affairs.

[Video footage](#) showed protesters toppling a statue of Mr. Nazarbayev in the capital of the Almaty region, Taldykorgan, with people chanted "shal ket," Kazakh for "Old man, leave!" He has played no role in combating the protests, leaving that to his hand-picked successor, Mr. Tokayev.

While initially conciliatory, the government has taken a steadily harder line against the protesters, imposing a strict state of emergency throughout the country.

Mr. Tokayev said Wednesday that he would assume all formal levers of power and promised to "act with maximum toughness." Kazakhtelecom, the country's largest telecommunications company, shut off internet access throughout the country on Wednesday afternoon.

Kazakhstan, with a population of 19 million, is by far the richest country in Central Asia, with a GDP per capita of \$27,000 and more than \$35 billion in reserves, yet it was still possible for the country to devolve into chaos in a matter of days.

The instability is a potential source of concern among foreign oil companies, particularly in the United States. ExxonMobil and Chevron have invested tens of billions of dollars in western Kazakhstan, the region where the unrest began this month. A Chevron-led consortium is in the midst of a project to expand output at the on-land Tengiz oil field at an estimated cost of \$37 billion, one of the single largest energy investments in the world today.

Many Kazakhs were incensed by the increase in the gas price because their country is not just the recipient of tens of billions in energy investments but also an exporter of oil and gas. The price rise added to the economic misery in a country where the coronavirus pandemic has helped underscore severe income inequality.

Mukhtar Umbetov, a rights activist who took part in protests in Aktau, said that while the turmoil may have been sparked by economic grievances and the pandemic, the root cause was the absence of democratic processes. The Kazakh government, he said, "has removed all legal ways to participate in politics."

Speaking by phone from Aktau, on the Caspian Sea, he said that "people don't have any political intermediaries who would solve problems that exist in the country."

Nevertheless, he said, in a country where the average salary is \$570 a month — and where many earn considerably less than that — economic resentments are not to be discounted. "Kazakhstan is rich, but its

natural resources are not working in the interests of all; they work in the interests of a small group of people.”

As the protests have unfolded, the demands of the demonstrators have expanded to include broader political liberalization. Among the changes they seek is the direct election of Kazakhstan’s regional leaders, rather than the current system of presidential appointment.

Much of the ire has been directed at the country’s autocratic former ruler, Mr. Nazarbayev, who led the country for 30 years after independence in 1991. Mr. Tokayev became president after elections derided by Western observers as flawed.

After that, Mr. Nazarbayev was formally recognized as the “leader of the nation,” and the country’s capital was renamed Nur-Sultan in his honor. Until now, he had been widely regarded as the shadow leader of Kazakhstan despite the formal transition of power to Mr. Tokayev.

But that appears set to change. On Tuesday, Mr. Tokayev dismissed Samat Abish, Mr. Nazarbayev’s nephew, from the position of first deputy head of the country’s national security service, a successor to the K.G.B. And on Wednesday, Mr. Tokayev replaced Mr. Nazarbayev as head of the country’s Security Council.

Speaking about the unrest, Mr. Tokayev asserted that the protests were “highly organized” as part of a “meticulously thought-out plan of conspirators, who were motivated financially.” He said that people had been “killed and wounded” and that “crowds of bandit elements beat and mocked servicemen, took them naked through the streets, abused women and robbed shops.”

The countries of the former Soviet Union are watching the protests closely. For Russia, the events represent another possible challenge to autocratic power in a neighboring country.

Russia intervened militarily in Ukraine in 2014 after pro-democracy protests erupted there, and the Kremlin offered support to the Belarusian dictator Aleksandr G. Lukashenko as he violently crushed peaceful protests against his autocratic rule in 2020. The Kremlin currently has “peacekeeping” forces stationed in Transnistria and the contested territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as supporting Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. It also occupies parts of Georgia and Abkhazia.

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HEADLINE	01/05 India rising omicron wave: mixed signals?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/world/asia/india-omicron-coronavirus.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=World%20News">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/world/asia/india-omicron-coronavirus.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=World%20News</a>
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI — When the Omicron coronavirus variant spread through India late in December, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged the nation to be vigilant and follow medical guidelines. Arvind Kejriwal, the chief minister of the capital region of Delhi, swiftly introduced night curfews, shut down movie theaters, and slashed restaurants and public transport to half capacity.</p> <p>Then, both men hit the campaign trail, often appearing without masks in packed rallies of thousands.</p> <p>“When it is our bread and butter at stake, they force restrictions and lockdowns,” said Ajay Tiwari, a 41-year-old taxi driver in New Delhi. “There are much bigger crowds at political rallies, but they don’t impose any lockdown in those areas. It really pains us deep in the heart.”</p> <p>As Omicron fuels a rapid spread of new infections through India’s major urban hubs, the country’s pandemic fatigue has been intensified by a sense of déjà vu and the frustration of mixed signals.</p> <p>It has been just a few months since the deadly Delta variant ravaged the country, when <a href="#">government leaders vastly underestimated its threat</a> and publicly flouted their own advice. The memories of <a href="#">overwhelmed hospitals</a> and <a href="#">funeral pyres working around the clock</a> are still all too fresh here.</p>

The metropolis of Mumbai on Wednesday reported more than 15,000 new infections in 24 hours — the highest daily caseload since the pandemic began, beating the city’s previous record of about 11,000 cases during the second wave in the spring. In New Delhi, the number of daily infections increased by nearly 100 percent overnight.

The sheer size of India’s population, at 1.4 billion, has always kept experts wary about the prospects of a new coronavirus variant. In few places around the world was the toll of Delta as stark as in India. The country’s official figures show about half a million pandemic deaths — a number that experts say [vastly undercounts the real toll](#).

Omicron’s high transmissibility is such that cases are multiplying at a dangerously rapid pace, and it appears to be ignoring India’s main line of defense: a vaccination drive that has covered about half of the population. Initial studies show that the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, a locally manufactured version of which has been used for about 90 percent of India’s vaccinations, does not protect against Omicron infections, though it appears to help reduce the severity of the illness.

Sitabhra Sinha, a professor of physics and computational biology at the Institute of Mathematical Sciences in Chennai, said his research into the reproduction rate of the virus — an indicator of how fast it is spreading that is called the “R value” — in major cities like Delhi and Mumbai shows “insanely high” numbers for cities that had built decent immunity. Both had a large number of infections in the spring, and a majority of their adult populations have been vaccinated.

“Given this high R value, one is looking at incredibly large numbers unless something is done to stop the spread,” he said.

But officials appear to be latching onto the optimism of the early indications from places like South Africa, where a fast spread of the variant did not cause devastating damage, rather than drawing lessons from the botched response to the Delta wave in the spring that ravaged India.

Dr. Anand Krishnan, a professor of epidemiology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, said India’s messaging of the new variant as “a mild illness” has led to complacency.

“The health system has stopped being complacent. But the population is complacent. People are not wearing masks or changing their behavior,” Dr. Krishnan said. “They think it is a mild illness, and whatever restrictions are being imposed are seen more as a nuisance than necessary.”

Scientists say any optimism about Omicron is premature simply because of how many people the variant could infect.

“Even if it is a microscopic percentage who require hospitalization,” Dr. Sinha said, “the fact is that the total population we’re talking about is huge.”

Although the percentage of newly infected people turning to hospitals has been increasing in recent days, data from India’s worst-hit cities — Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata — showed that only a small number of Covid-designated beds were occupied so far. Data [compiled by the Observer Research Foundation](#) showed that about three percent of the known active cases in Delhi and about 12 percent in Mumbai have required hospitalization.

Dr. J. A. Jayalal, until recently the president of The Indian Medical Association, said what worried him was not hospital beds or oxygen running out — capacity that Indian officials have been trying to expand after the deadly shortfalls during the Delta wave — but that the health system might face an acute shortfall of health workers.

About 1,800 Indian doctors are known to have died from Covid-19 since the pandemic began, Dr. Jayalal said. Health workers are struggling with [pandemic fatigue](#). Tens of thousands of doctors only recently

called off [a strike](#) protesting being overworked and a delay in recruiting new doctors. Reports in local media suggest hundreds of doctors and medical workers have tested positive in recent days.

“In our medical fraternity, a lot of positive cases have been reported. That means they will not be available for work,” Dr. Jayalal said. “The problem with mild infections is that they may not come to a major hospital for admission, but they will still go to their family doctor or a general practitioner,” putting those doctors at risk of infection, he added.

As with the Delta wave, Omicron is spreading in India at a time of high public activity — busy holiday travel, and large election rallies across several states that are going to the polls in the coming months.

Prime Minister Modi and his lieutenants have been holding large rallies in Uttar Pradesh, the state of 200 million people run by a Modi protégé who is up for re-election.

Mr. Kejriwal, the chief minister of Delhi and a prominent opposition leader, has also been a ubiquitous figure at rallies. He has been trying to expand his small party in the several states that are up for elections this year. Even as he put Delhi under restrictions, he continued campaigning in those states.

A day after a large rally in the state of Uttarakhand where Mr. Kejriwal appeared on stage without a mask, he had some bad news to share on Twitter.

“I have tested positive for Covid,” he said. “Those who came in touch with me in last few days, kindly isolate.”

Hours later, his party’s Facebook page put out new instructions to residents of Delhi with a poster bearing Mr. Kejriwal’s picture.

“The war against corona continues,” it said. “WEEKEND CURFEW announced in Delhi.”

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HEADLINE	01/05 Homer Plessy pardon; still a painful legacy
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/homer-plessy-pardon.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=US%20News">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/homer-plessy-pardon.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=US%20News</a>
GIST	<p>Descendants of <a href="#">Homer Plessy</a> like to say that he was a civil rights activist before most people in Louisiana were familiar with such a term. In 1892, Plessy, a racially mixed shoemaker, boarded a whites-only train car in New Orleans, well aware that he was breaking the law and would most likely be arrested.</p> <p>He was indeed charged with violating the state’s Separate Car Act, beginning a legal battle that ascended all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. On Wednesday — nearly a century after Plessy’s death — Gov. John Bel Edwards pardoned him for the offense, scrubbing his record of a crime that came with a \$25 fine.</p> <p>As he signed the pardon, Mr. Edwards said he also had a much more ambitious aim: confronting a painful and shameful history that Plessy’s case came to represent. The Supreme Court case, Plessy v. Ferguson, resulted in a decision that paved the way for the “separate but equal” doctrine and gave legal backing to the Jim Crow laws that segregated and disenfranchised African Americans in the South for decades.</p> <p>“It left a stain on the fabric of our country and on this state and on this city,” Mr. Edwards said before he signed the pardon, speaking at the station in New Orleans where Plessy boarded the train where he was arrested. “And, quite frankly, those consequences are still felt today.”</p> <p>“Homer Plessy,” he added, “more than did his part to prevent this stain.”</p> <p>The pardon by Mr. Edwards was the first issued under the Avery C. Alexander Act, a measure passed by Louisiana lawmakers meant to clear the records of those convicted of violating laws that enforced</p>

segregation or discrimination. It is named for a civil rights leader and longtime member of the Louisiana House of Representatives who died in 1999.

The Separate Car Act, enacted in 1890, was among a flurry of bills passed across the South to construct a new racist order after Reconstruction and the end of slavery, and is precisely the kind of law the Avery C. Alexander Act was intended to address.

“I did not submit this pardon asking for Homer Plessy to be forgiven; I submitted asking for us to be forgiven, the institution,” Jason Williams, the Orleans Parish district attorney, said on Wednesday. “We must reckon with our past. We must confront, we must acknowledge and we must humbly ask for forgiveness for the role our legal institutions have played in the apartheid the people of this country have endured.”

Plessy was part of a group of local activists who mobilized in response to the Separate Car law. He boarded the East Louisiana Railway’s No. 8 train in New Orleans with the aim of getting arrested. The group had picked Plessy to ride the train because he could pass for a white man.

A conductor asked Plessy if he was “colored,” and he said that he was. When the conductor instructed him to move to a different car, Plessy resisted. After his arrest, the activist group posted his \$500 bond.

His first court appearance came several months later before Judge John Howard Ferguson, who decided not to bring the case to trial, which allowed Plessy’s lawyers to bring an appeal to higher courts. The case continued for several years before it reached the Supreme Court in 1896.

The court ruled 7 to 1 against Plessy — a decision that came to haunt the court as it became widely regarded as one of the lowest points in the institution’s history. The [lone dissenter](#), Justice John Marshall Harlan, wrote: “In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man and takes no account of his surroundings or his color when his civil rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved.”

But the majority opinion “enshrined white supremacy” in law, Angela A. Allen-Bell, a professor at Southern University Law Center in Baton Rouge, said at an event celebrating the pardon on Wednesday. “Plessy normalized the belief of the inferiority of people of color,” she said. “It etched a seal of legality on a system of social degradation and instantly reversed the aims of Reconstruction.”

The Louisiana Board of Pardons voted in support of a pardon in November, sending its recommendation to Governor Edwards.

“The stroke of my pen on this pardon,” Mr. Edwards said, “while momentous, it does not erase generations of pain and discrimination. It doesn’t eradicate all the wrongs wrought by the Plessy court or fix all of our present challenges. We can all acknowledge we have a long ways to go, but this pardon is a step in the right direction.”

The pardon grew out of a larger effort by descendants of Plessy and Judge Ferguson to educate others on the continued relevance of Plessy’s actions and the long, devastating reach of the ruling. The notion of separate but equal was maintained until 1954, when the Brown v. Board of Education decision by the Supreme Court established that segregation in schools was unconstitutional.

After the ruling against him, Plessy returned to Judge Ferguson’s court, changed his plea to guilty and paid his fine. He went on to work as a collector for an insurance company and died in 1925.

“I feel like my feet are not touching the ground today because the ancestors are carrying me,” said Keith M. Plessy, a distant relative of Plessy’s who, with Phoebe Ferguson, a descendant of the judge, started the Plessy and Ferguson Foundation. “This is truly a blessed day.”

HEADLINE	<b>01/05 WHO: IHU variant in France not a concern</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/world/covid-variant-france.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/world/covid-variant-france.html</a>
GIST	<p>The World Health Organization says that it is monitoring a coronavirus variant detected in a small number of patients in France, but that, for now, there is little reason to worry about its spread.</p> <p>The B.1.640.2 variant was first identified in October and uploaded to <a href="#">Gisaid</a>, a database for disease variants, on Nov. 4. Only about 20 samples have been sequenced so far, experts said this week, and only one since early December.</p> <p>Abdi Mahmud, a Covid incident manager with the W.H.O., told reporters in Geneva on Tuesday that the variant had been on the agency's radar since November, but added that it did not appear to have spread widely over the past two months.</p> <p>"That virus has had a lot of chances to pick up," he said.</p> <p>By contrast, <a href="#">the Omicron variant</a>, which was first uploaded to Gisaid on Nov. 23, has more than 120,000 sequences in the database. (The vast majority of Omicron cases have not been sequenced.) It has been detected in at least <a href="#">128 countries</a>, according to the W.H.O., and is fueling record-high case numbers in many parts of the world.</p> <p>Concerns over the variant in France arose after researchers found that it contained 46 mutations that differed from the original version of the coronavirus. Omicron also has a high number of mutations, which researchers believe made it far more transmissible.</p> <p>According to <a href="#">a research paper</a> that was published on a preprint server in late December, but that has not been peer-reviewed, the B.1.640.2 variant was first detected in southeastern France in a vaccinated person who had recently traveled from Cameroon. Researchers found a total of 12 cases in the area and named the variant "I.H.U.," after the research institute in Marseille that helped identify it.</p> <p>"It is too early to speculate on virological, epidemiological or clinical features of this I.H.U. variant based on these 12 cases," researchers wrote.</p> <p>Numerous coronavirus variants have emerged over the past two years, and the reasons that some spread widely while others do not <a href="#">are complex</a>. For now, several independent researchers say there is little reason to be concerned about the I.H.U. variant.</p> <p>Tom Peacock, a virologist at Imperial College in London, <a href="#">tweeted</a> this week that, so far, "this virus has had a decent chance to cause trouble but never really materialised."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 CDC stumbles: policy guidance, messaging</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/politics/cdc-rochelle-walensky-covid-isolation-testing.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/politics/cdc-rochelle-walensky-covid-isolation-testing.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Two days before Christmas, with the Omicron variant driving a near-vertical rise in new coronavirus cases, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention alerted the White House that she planned to recommend that people infected with the virus isolate for five days instead of 10.</p> <p>The director, Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, had faced previous criticism for issuing recommendations that confused the public and in some cases caught the White House off guard. Determined to avoid that this time, she briefed other top Biden health officials on her proposal so they would all be on the same page, according to two people familiar with her actions.</p> <p>It did not work out that way. Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, and Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, the surgeon general, were concerned that the new guidance did not urge people to get a</p>



negative Covid test before ending their isolation. After the new recommendation became public, they both took issue with it on national television, saying they expected the C.D.C. to clarify its advice.

On Wednesday, nine days after the guidance was issued and a day after it was slightly modified to include some advice on testing, the C.D.C. was still having a hard time explaining itself. “How do you expect people to keep track of what they can and can’t do?” a CNN reporter demanded of Dr. Walensky at a White House briefing.

It was a familiar refrain.

President Biden came into office vowing to restore public trust in the C.D.C. after the Trump White House had tied the agency’s hands and manipulated its scientific judgments on the pandemic for political ends. Yet in his first year of battling the coronavirus, Mr. Biden has presided over a series of messaging failures that have followed a familiar pattern, with Dr. Walensky and her team making what experts say are largely sound decisions, but fumbling in communicating them to America.

Dr. Walensky, a highly regarded infectious disease expert from Boston with no prior government experience, insisted in February that schools must keep students six feet apart; in March, she said three feet was enough. She said in February that teachers did not need to be vaccinated to reopen schools; the White House said the next day that she was speaking “in her personal capacity.”

In May, she said that vaccinated people generally did not need to wear masks in public, a sudden change that flummoxed state health officials. Two months later, she reversed that guidance after it was shown that vaccinated people could still transmit the virus.

With the virus throwing one curveball after another, changing advice from the C.D.C. is a given. But Dr. Walensky’s critics say the C.D.C.’s recommendations are sometimes so confusing or abruptly modified that they seem more like drafts than fully vetted proclamations.

“I don’t think that the C.D.C. guidelines were significantly wrong,” Dr. Tom Frieden, the agency’s director under former President Barack Obama, said of the latest recommendations on isolation for those with Covid. But he added, “I think the way they were released was very problematic.”

The crux of the problem, several administration officials said, is a failure by the C.D.C. and the Biden administration’s messaging experts to work in concert. Who is to blame for that is a matter of debate. Dr. Walensky’s critics say she is not collaborative enough, too often springing decisions on other federal officials who then struggle to defend them in public. Her defenders say she strives to coordinate, but that it is not her job to ensure consensus across the entire administration.

Some suggest the White House has gone too far in its hands-off, let-the-scientists-rule approach, leaving a vacuum of leadership and forcing ad-hoc coordination between the various public health agencies. That has been exacerbated by a health secretary, Xavier Becerra, who receives routine briefings from scientists but does not settle interagency disputes about the pandemic response.

Dr. Fauci, the administration’s best-known spokesman on the pandemic, has further muddied the waters at times, publicly contradicting the C.D.C. as he did this week or making statements he has later walked back.

He said in late December, for instance, that a vaccination requirement for domestic airline passengers should be seriously considered, leaving the White House to field a flurry of questions on a policy it was not prepared to recommend. Later, he said a mandate was unlikely.

On Wednesday, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said it was OK for the C.D.C. to modify its guidance, adding that, for one thing, “if they hadn’t changed their recommendations over the course of time, schools would probably be closed across the country.”



But even some within Dr. Walensky's own agency agree that the C.D.C.'s public pronouncements on the pandemic have repeatedly fallen short, long after experts say the agency should have mastered clear and concise public messaging on the worst public health crisis in a century.

The handling of the isolation guidance was a case study in how to confuse the public. And the controversy is not over: health experts continued on Wednesday to criticize the C.D.C.'s decision not to recommend a negative test before people with Covid end a five-day isolation.

"The new recommendations on quarantine and isolation are not only confusing, but are risking further spread of the virus," the American Medical Association said in a statement on Wednesday.

Dr. Walensky said that she and career staff finished devising the guidance over the Christmas weekend. Officials decided that people with Covid-19 could end their isolation after five days instead of 10 if they were asymptomatic or if their symptoms were "resolving," meaning no fever for 24 hours. The agency said 85 to 90 percent of viral transmission occurred within that initial five-day period.

Dr. Walensky verbally briefed other senior federal officials on the new guidance at least twice that weekend, defending her decision not to recommend that people test negative first. One person familiar with Dr. Walensky's account said no one raised serious objections.

But Dr. Fauci said in an interview that he did not see the final version before it was released. Others familiar with the situation said the C.D.C. did not share it before posting it publicly on Dec. 27.

Although the Food and Drug Administration now typically holds a news briefing after major regulatory moves on Covid vaccines or treatments, the C.D.C. held no briefing on the decision. Indeed, it has not held regular news conferences since former President Donald J. Trump put an end to them in early 2020. Dr. Walensky does take questions at least once a week during the White House's pandemic news briefings.

The agency's minimalist explanation immediately set off a fraught debate: Why not recommend a negative test before ending isolation? Was it because tests were in short supply? Was the agency shortening the isolation period to keep the economy running instead of for science-based reasons?

"Where the messaging gets muddled is where it is unclear what is driving the decision," said Dr. Celine R. Gounder, an infectious disease expert at Bellevue Hospital Center in New York who considers Dr. Walensky a mentor.

Dr. Gounder said she and other experts suspected that a shortage of tests was behind the decision, and that if Dr. Walensky had said so, "the public health community would have been more understanding." Dr. Walensky said Wednesday that the guidance had "nothing to do with the shortage of available tests."

In an interview with The Times last week, Dr. Walensky said the advice was carefully crafted with a team of career officials. She said rapid tests were meant to diagnose infection, not predict the risk of spreading it — a position echoed by the F.D.A., which regulates the tests.

"They're not authorized for that use. They haven't been studied for that," Dr. Walensky said. "So, in my sort of clinical judgment, and my public health judgment, you don't necessarily do a test if you don't know what you're going to do with the results."

In an interview Tuesday evening, Dr. Fauci said he favored a testing recommendation because a positive test was "very much associated" with the virus replicating in a person's nose and throat — an indication of infectiousness.

Two people familiar with Dr. Murthy's thinking said he shared Dr. Fauci's views.

Dr. Fauci said he had shared his opinion with Dr. Walensky in "very collegial, cooperative conversations" in which they discussed amending the guidance.

In the end, the agency largely stuck to its stance. But the more detailed guidance, issued on Tuesday, states that if people with Covid have access to testing and want to be tested, the best approach is to take a rapid test near the end of the five-day isolation period.

Asked why she changed it, Dr. Walensky said at Wednesday's White House briefing that "it became very clear that people were interested in using the rapid test" and therefore it made sense to tell them how best to use it.

Dr. Frieden said there were three rules to putting out public health guidance: it must be technically correct, simple and workable in the real world.

Dr. Walensky certainly had real-world implications to consider: Would it make sense to recommend that people take Covid tests, when they are so hard to find? And with so many people getting infected with Omicron, encouraging them all to stay home for longer than five days could cripple the economy.

"Why do you put in place a recommendation that citizens can't actually fulfill?" asked Michael T. Osterholm, an infectious disease expert at the University of Minnesota who supports Dr. Walensky's initial guidance.

Dr. Frieden, who led the C.D.C. for eight years — including during the Ebola crisis — said that in developing new guidance, he would first circulate it within the government to develop consensus among top officials. Then he would hold what he called a "murder board" — a mock question-and-answer session — to "practice for really tough questions."

Then, joined by subject-matter experts, he would face reporters. He said it was not inappropriate for the White House to offer the C.D.C. messaging advice, so long as it did not interfere in scientific decisions.

In an interview with The Times last month, Dr. Walensky said she had been working on improving coordination with the White House and other federal health officials, especially since May, when her statement that vaccinated people no longer needed to wear masks took some by surprise.

"I didn't have the relationships at the time then that I even have now, and certainly there are many more people in government who have many more relationships than I do," she said. "And so that has been a learning curve."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Chicago in limbo: schools abruptly close</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/chicago-schools-close-teachers-union-child-care.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/chicago-schools-close-teachers-union-child-care.html</a>
GIST	<p>CHICAGO — Parents across Chicago raced to find child care on Wednesday morning after jarring news: Classes in the nation's third-largest public school district were canceled. The teachers' union and Mayor Lori Lightfoot's administration had failed to agree on how to keep schools open during an Omicron-fueled virus surge.</p> <p>Across the country, the wildly contagious Omicron variant has infected millions and complicated the return to classrooms and workplaces. But nowhere has returning to school been more acrimonious and unpredictable than in Chicago, where, after two days back in classrooms following winter break, 73 percent of teachers voted to stop reporting to work. The city responded by calling off school altogether, refusing the teachers' call for remote instruction. With no deal reached by Wednesday evening, district officials said classes would be canceled again on Thursday.</p> <p>The abrupt pause in the academic calendar, rooted in years of enmity between the Chicago Teachers Union and City Hall, jumbled plans for hundreds of thousands of students and posed another major test for Ms. Lightfoot, a Democrat whose tenure has been marked by labor strife, the pandemic and a surge in homicides.</p>

“If they are in class and Covid is rampaging, that’s a problem. If they are not there and out on the streets, that’s a problem,” said Tamar Manasseh, who leads an anti-violence group in the city, and who said she was looking into ways to help children with nowhere to go during the day. “This has put us in an untenable situation.”

Ms. Lightfoot, whose disagreements with the Chicago Teachers Union date back to a strike in the early months of her term, said in an interview that the two sides remained far apart as negotiations continued. Ms. Lightfoot said she intended to take legal action against the union, and on Monday evening said the city had filed an unfair labor practices complaint. The school district opened buildings for meal distribution on Wednesday and published a list of places where parents could get emergency child care.

“The consequences of the union acting like this time and time again are profound,” Ms. Lightfoot said. She added, “You think about the consequences for the families to be faced with the hostage choice of either going to work or taking care of their kids and home-schooling — no parent should be put in that position.”

Crises have been accumulating in Chicago. Coronavirus cases have surged to record levels. The Chicago Police Department announced over the weekend that about 800 people had been murdered in 2021, more than in any recent year. Then, after 11 p.m. on Tuesday, parents of more than 300,000 schoolchildren were told there would be no classes on Wednesday, and perhaps for much longer.

Jesse Sharkey, the union president, said an increase of cases in the school system and the onslaught of Omicron, which causes milder illness than other variants but frequent breakthrough infections, had heightened members’ concern. He called for testing all students before classrooms reopened, as well as stepped-up surveillance testing after that. The district had instituted an optional testing plan over winter break, but most of the 150,000 or so mail-in P.C.R. tests given to students were never returned; of the ones that were, a majority produced invalid results.

“If you want to get us back into the schools quicker, provide testing,” he said.

Mr. Sharkey and Stacy Davis Gates, the union’s vice president, also criticized the mayor for her approach to negotiations and for her repeated public criticisms of the union. Members of Ms. Lightfoot’s administration have defended the school system’s efforts to make classrooms safe and have emphasized that children rarely face severe outcomes from Covid-19.

“The mayor wants to fight when we should be working,” Ms. Davis Gates said. “She’s fighting us instead of the virus. I don’t understand it.”

She said the mayor’s “her-way-or-the-highway” leadership style had made matters worse. “The mayor, bless her heart, she doesn’t understand partnership and collaboration,” Ms. Davis Gates said.

The standoff has left parents like Tonya Patterson with few good options. Ms. Patterson, a bank teller, was among a handful of parents who dropped a child off at Ellington Elementary on the city’s West Side, where employees who were not part of the teachers’ job action were providing emergency child care.

Ms. Patterson faulted both sides for the discord. By the time she learned classes were canceled, she said it was too late to arrange for a babysitter.

“I understand they want to be safe, but I have to work,” Ms. Patterson said. “I don’t understand why they are so special.”

Still, many people in the city expressed concern about children attending school in person at a time when coronavirus cases are continuing to spike, and when hospitalizations have also increased. Districts in Milwaukee, Atlanta and Cleveland, among other cities, have switched to remote instruction in the face of

rising cases. Most large districts, including in New York and Miami, have continued in-person teaching. No other city has seen a public labor dispute on the scale of Chicago.

At a West Side grocery store on Wednesday morning, Karen Washington had ventured out in the frigid weather with her 6-year-old granddaughter, a first grader, because the girl's parents were working. Ms. Washington said she supported the teachers' decision.

"Kids don't know how to social distance," Ms. Washington said. "They play and get close and take off their masks."

Union members have asked for better masks, more testing and clearer rules for closing schools with outbreaks.

Still, city officials have insisted that schools are safe, and that a districtwide shutdown only harmed struggling families. Pedro Martinez, the district's chief executive, suggested on Tuesday that misinformation was causing most of the anxiety. Ms. Lightfoot said the union's position also overlooked the academic and social challenges many children faced when not in school.

"Are they going to put up the money to pay for the tutors to deal with the challenges that our students are facing?" Ms. Lightfoot said. "Are they going to put forth the effort to help with the social-emotional consequences of our kids being disconnected from their social network, from extracurricular activity and all of the cascading consequences?"

Relations between the Chicago Teachers Union and City Hall have been extraordinarily tense for a decade, stretching across the tenures of Ms. Lightfoot and her predecessor, Rahm Emanuel. In 2019, months before the pandemic, teachers went on strike for 11 days and extracted concessions from Ms. Lightfoot on pay, class sizes and support staff. A year ago, when schools first returned to in-person instruction, the city and union engaged in weeks of tense negotiations.

Ms. Lightfoot, a former federal prosecutor who had never held elective office, won all 50 of the city's wards in 2019. She became the first Black woman to lead the nation's third-largest city after campaigning as an outsider on promises to invest in neighborhoods and root out corruption. But much of her agenda was quickly overshadowed by the pandemic and struggles with public employee unions, including the Fraternal Order of Police, which fought her on a requirement to report vaccination status, and the teachers' union, with which she has repeatedly clashed.

The Chicago Teachers Union is uniquely powerful and active in local politics, calling for more investment in schools and regularly weighing in on racial justice and policing issues.

"At the end of the day, we have a two-party system in Chicago: We have the regular Democratic Party, the Republican Party is almost nonexistent, then we have the Chicago Teachers Union," said Paul Vallas, who led Chicago Public Schools in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and who ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 2019.

Mr. Vallas, a Democrat who supports expanding charter schools, urged Ms. Lightfoot not to give into the union's requests. He said he worried about the long-term consequences of the work stoppages and labor disputes.

"They keep on making demands, she keeps on satisfying their demands, and then they make more demands," Mr. Vallas said.

A vast majority of districts in the country remain open, and President Biden said this week that schools should use leftover federal funds from last year's stimulus package to continue in-person instruction despite the rise of the Omicron variant.

“He wants schools to be open,” Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said on Wednesday when asked about the dispute in Chicago. “We know they can open safely and we’re here to help make that happen.” She added, “This includes schools everywhere, including in Chicago.”

But in Chicago, some said they did not believe that the district had adequately adjusted to the incursion of Omicron. Ja'Mal Green, an activist and former mayoral candidate who lives on the South Side, said he held his son out of kindergarten this week because he did not think the district had adequate virus precautions.

Mr. Green praised the union’s actions, and said he worried about the convergence of the pandemic, street violence and educational disruption in the city.

“The mayor really has a political beef with the union and doesn’t want to come to any type of compromise because she wants to beat them over the head for the strikes and the things that have happened in the past,” said Mr. Green, who has frequently criticized Ms. Lightfoot.

Alderman Daniel La Spata, who supports the union’s requests, said he had heard from several parents who agreed with the teachers’ demands but were struggling with the uncertainty of when and how classes would be held.

“They want testing. They want vaccination. They want to know that the classrooms are safe and healthy,” said Mr. La Spata, who represents an area west and northwest of downtown. “They also want stability. They want to know what is going to be happening in the children’s lives from day to day.”

On Wednesday afternoon, with negotiations continuing, teachers gathered by the hundreds outside Union Park for a car caravan.

Christine Dussault, a special-education teacher at Ravenswood Elementary, said that there had been persistent problems with protective equipment and contact tracing, and that getting students to wear masks could be a challenge. Jennifer Friedhart, a seventh-grade teacher at Beaubien Elementary, said teachers were in a difficult position and needed more testing.

“I don’t want to teach remote, but I don’t want to teach when it’s unsafe,” she said. “Right now I feel like it’s unsafe. It’s scary.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Common rapid tests fail detect omicron?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/health/covid-rapid-test-omicron-detection.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/health/covid-rapid-test-omicron-detection.html</a>
GIST	<p>A small, <a href="#">new real-world study</a> suggests that two widely used at-home antigen tests, the Abbott BinaxNOW and Quidel QuickVue, may fail to detect some Omicron infections even when people are carrying high levels of the coronavirus.</p> <p>The study, which has not yet been peer-reviewed, focused on 30 people infected with the virus at five workplaces that experienced what were most likely outbreaks of the Omicron variant in December. The people received both saliva-based P.C.R. tests and rapid antigen tests using nasal swabs.</p> <p>It took three days, on average, for people to test positive on a rapid antigen test after their first positive P.C.R. result. In four cases, people transmitted the virus to others while the rapid test showed the negative result, according to the study, which was conducted by several members of the Covid-19 Sports and Society Working Group.</p> <p>It is not clear whether the infections were missed because the antigen tests are inherently less sensitive to Omicron or because saliva tests may be better at detecting the new variant.</p>

But the results are consistent with other preliminary evidence that the at-home tests that many Americans have come to rely on — at least as currently administered, with a nasal swab — may fail to detect some Omicron cases in the first days of infection.

The researchers said they shared their results with federal officials — including at the White House, the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — in real-time, as the outbreaks were occurring last month.

“They’re aware that there are flaws with antigen testing,” said Dr. Robby Sikka, an author of the study and chair of the working group.

The study comes a week after the Food and Drug Administration [released its own update](#) on the effectiveness of the rapid antigen tests. “Early data suggests that antigen tests do detect the Omicron variant but may have reduced sensitivity,” the agency said.

Many of the studies are early and small, and much more data is needed. The tests, which can deliver results at home in minutes, remain an important public health tool, and positive results are especially likely to be informative, many scientists said. (The wait for P.C.R. results can stretch for days.)

“The message is not that we should stop using these tests,” said Isabella Eckerle, a clinical virologist at the University of Geneva in Switzerland.

But people should be cautious about interpreting negative results, especially when they have symptoms or believe they may have been exposed to the virus.

“It’s not a ticket that allows you to go back to normal or to drop any other measures,” Dr. Eckerle said.

### **Assessing sensitivity**

Antigen tests are designed to detect proteins on the surface of the coronavirus. If mutations in the virus change the structure of these proteins, antigen tests might fail to detect the variant.

The [Omicron variant has about 50 mutations](#), including more than 30 on the spike protein alone. Most rapid antigen tests are designed to detect more stable targets, which are far less mutated in Omicron.

Still, even minor-seeming mutations can affect a virus’s surface proteins, “sometimes in non-obvious ways,” said John Moore, a virologist at Weill Cornell Medicine. “Only experimental data can determine whether there is an impact or not.”

The F.D.A. in September [told makers of rapid tests](#) that they would be required to continue to test their products as new variants emerged, and, if asked, to share those results with the agency.

Many companies have announced that their tests can detect Omicron, and several independent scientists said that they believed the tests should be capable of recognizing the variant, especially when present at high levels. But a few new studies raise questions about the tests’ sensitivity.

The F.D.A.’s update stemmed from an evaluation it is doing with the National Institutes of Health, said Bruce Tromberg, director of the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering. The scientists evaluated the antigen tests using pooled samples of nasal mucus collected from multiple people with Omicron, as well as similar pooled samples from Delta patients.

Scientists then diluted each of these pooled samples until the antigen tests no longer detected the virus. The tests were able to detect more dilute solutions of Delta samples than Omicron samples, suggesting that the tests may be less sensitive to the new variant, Dr. Tromberg said. Still, he added, in real-world settings, “it may not translate into any different sensitivity.”

An F.D.A. spokeswoman, Stephanie Caccamo, said last week that studies were underway “to confirm the reason for the apparent decreased sensitivity.”

“Once that is known,” she said, “adjustments to existing tests can be undertaken by each developer with support from the F.D.A., if appropriate.”

The F.D.A. update was not the first hint that some antigen tests may be less sensitive to Omicron. Dr. Eckerle and her colleagues [recently evaluated the performance of seven antigen tests](#) against samples of the virus grown from specimens taken from people infected with Omicron. Overall, the researchers found, the tests were less sensitive to Omicron than to previous variants.

“They missed samples with infectious virus, and they missed samples that had quite a decent viral load,” Dr. Eckerle said. The work has not yet been published in a scientific journal.

But there was also vast variability in the performance of the different tests, most of which are not available in the United States. And an Australian study, which examined a mostly different collection of antigen tests, found that the tests [had a similar sensitivity to Omicron and Delta](#).

More data are needed, experts said.

“Each test is going to have to be evaluated independently any time there’s a new variant,” said David O’Connor, a virologist at the University of Wisconsin, Madison who urged people not to stop using rapid tests. “And that takes some time.”

### **Swabbing sites**

The new study focused on five New York and California workplaces that had virus outbreaks in December. In 29 of 30 people, samples of the virus produced a telltale genetic pattern on P.C.R. tests, suggesting that these individuals were most likely infected with Omicron.

Each participant took P.C.R. and antigen tests daily over a period of up to 10 days. The discordant results overwhelmingly came during the first three days of infection.

“A negative result may not actually be a negative result,” said Anne Wyllie, a microbiologist at the Yale School of Public Health and an author of the new study. “People should not ignore high risk exposures. They should not ignore symptoms.”

The study’s other authors are Blythe Adamson, the founder of Infectious Economics, a public health consulting company, and Dr. Prem Premrurit, the chief executive of Mirimus Laboratories, which offers saliva-based P.C.R. testing.

An Abbott spokesman, John Koval, said on Wednesday that the finding that a P.C.R. test is more sensitive is “not new.”

“Due to immediate turnaround time, frequent rapid antigen testing does slow transmission — and with a highly infectious variant frequent testing is needed, which is not realistic with P.C.R.,” he wrote in an email.

Quidel’s president, Douglas Bryant, said [in a statement](#) that the company performed recent testing using samples from South Africa and confirmed that its rapid tests are detecting the Omicron variant.

A company spokesperson also said that it was not surprising that saliva-based P.C.R. tests detected the virus before nasal swabs did, if the study accurately concluded that viral load peaks first in saliva. The company noted that its rapid tests only have F.D.A. clearance to collect nasal swab specimens.



In a smaller analysis, of five participants who took both nasal and saliva-based P.C.R. tests, the researchers found that the levels of virus peaked in saliva samples a day or two before they peaked in samples collected from the nose.

Those findings are consistent with a [recent report from South Africa](#), which has not yet been reviewed by experts. The researchers found that P.C.R. tests picked up a higher share of Omicron infections when saliva samples — produced by the rubbing of a swab inside the cheeks, around the gums and tongue — were used instead of nasal samples. The reverse was true for Delta.

“Ideally, until we can directly compare the relative sensitivity of the antigen tests, my suggestion would be to test both sites,” Diana Hardie, a clinical virologist at the University of Cape Town, who led the research, said in an email.

One possible explanation for the findings is that Omicron replicates faster or earlier in the throat and mouth than in the nose.

“While we’ll have to wait to see if the science bears out, that might be an indicator that that’s where the virus is growing first,” said Gigi Gronvall, an immunologist and testing expert at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “So if you’re going to look for the virus, which is what the tests do, then you may find more of it faster in the throat swab over the nose.”

Anecdotal reports have also emerged that some people who tested negative on antigen tests when they swabbed inside their noses received a positive result when they instead swabbed the back of their throats.

“There’s a lot of chatter around this,” said Nathan Grubaugh, a virologist at the Yale School of Public Health. “Obviously, that warrants further investigation.”

Some tests available in Britain call for [swabbing both the nose and the throat](#), but the antigen tests available in the United States are not authorized for the collection of saliva or samples from the throat.

Omicron’s rapid replication also means that there is a narrower window to catch the virus before it begins spreading, and that people may need to test themselves sooner after a potential exposure and as close as possible to an upcoming gathering or event, experts said. They may also need to test themselves more frequently overall, a particular challenge when the tests are in short supply.

People who may have been exposed to the virus should take at least two antigen tests over the course of about two days, experts said.

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HEADLINE	01/05 CDC endorses Pfizer booster: 12-17yr olds
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/05/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#pfizer-boosters-children-12-15-cdc">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/05/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#pfizer-boosters-children-12-15-cdc</a>
GIST	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Wednesday endorsed booster shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine for children ages 12 to 17, <a href="#">citing rising infections in teens and young adults</a> and a troubling increase in pediatric hospitalizations.</p> <p>As the contagious Omicron variant spreads through the country, public health officials have seized on extra vaccine doses as a first line of defense. Pfizer-BioNTech boosters are now authorized for any American older than 12 who is five months past his or her second dose of the vaccine.</p> <p>An advisory committee recommended the changes following a meeting on Wednesday. They were endorsed by Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the C.D.C. director, on Wednesday night. Adolescents ages 12 to 15 may begin to receive boosters immediately. Adolescents ages 16 and older <a href="#">were already permitted to receive booster shots</a>, but on Wednesday the C.D.C. panel strengthened the recommendation.</p>

The advisory panel followed [a similar move earlier this week by the Food and Drug Administration](#), which authorized Pfizer-BioNTech boosters for adolescents and shortened the recommended time interval between the initial vaccine regimen and the booster.

The F.D.A. also endorsed “an additional primary dose” of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for moderately or severely immunocompromised children aged 5 to 11, to be given 28 days after their second shots.

Studies suggest that vaccine side effects are minimal in children, although there is lingering concern about a link to myocarditis, a rare inflammation of the heart muscle that occurs more frequently in young men, following vaccination.

In Israel, which started administering boosters to adolescents aged 12 to 15 in June and rigorously tracks side effects, the health ministry identified two cases of myocarditis, among some 41,600 adolescents in this age group who received the booster.

Both children were hospitalized briefly and have fully recovered, said Dr. Sharon Alroy-Preis, an Israeli health official who addressed the committee.

The booster dramatically reduced infection rates among children aged 12 to 15, Dr. Alroy-Preis said. Although most infected youngsters generally did not experience severe Covid disease that required hospitalization, two children — one boy and one girl — have died, she said.

But while much of the committee’s discussion focused on the risks of the vaccine and its side effects, Dr. Camille Kotton, an associate professor at Harvard Medical School who specializes in transplant and immunocompromised patients, said the focus should be on the disease itself, which is having a devastating effect on vulnerable and immunocompromised patients.

“This is an important thing to think about — the risk of myocarditis from the disease itself,” Dr. Kotton said.

Though Omicron is generally perceived as causing less severe disease, she said, she now sees numerous patients on life support. Some have died.

“It’s a horrible state of affairs,” she said. “The highly infectious nature of Omicron is such that patients who have been incredibly careful the last two years have been getting infected with awful outcomes.”

Dr. Katherine Poehling, director of pediatric population health at Wake Forest School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C., expressed similar sentiments. “There are children waiting in the emergency department 18 hours and longer to get into the hospital because we’re so full,” she said. “We have parents asking us can their children get a booster dose, like older children.”

But several committee members said they were increasingly disturbed that only a minority of younger children are getting vaccinated at all, and said it is critical to increase the rates and adhere to other prevention strategies, like masking.

“We can’t put all of the burden on the people who are willing to get vaccinated,” said Lynn Bahta, a committee member who is a registered nurse with the Minnesota Department of Health. “When we have only half our adolescents vaccinated, that adds more burden as well. I am so concerned that the burden of disease prevention is all falling on the vaccinated and them getting the boosters.”

More than 70 percent of people 12 and older in the United States are fully vaccinated, [according to the C.D.C.](#) Children younger than age 5 are still not eligible for vaccination.

Americans aged 18 and older who received Moderna’s vaccine can get a booster of any available coronavirus vaccine six months after the second shot. Those who received Johnson & Johnson’s single-shot vaccine may get a booster dose of any available vaccine two months after their first shot.

	The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are both strongly preferred over the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, the C.D.C. has said. Only the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is authorized for children ages 5 to 11; boosters are not yet recommended for this group.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 CDC: stay 'up-to-date' on inoculations</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/05/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#cdc-fully-vaccinated-boosters">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/05/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#cdc-fully-vaccinated-boosters</a>
GIST	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Wednesday said it was not changing its definition of “full vaccination” against the coronavirus. But the agency changed its emphasis on the appropriate regimen, <a href="#">tweaking how it referred to the shots</a>.</p> <p>The agency said that three doses of Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna’s vaccines should be considered “up-to-date” inoculations, and that Johnson &amp; Johnson recipients should receive a second dose, preferably of Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech, to also be considered up to date.</p> <p>The move amounted to a recommendation from federal health officials that Americans should change how they talk about <a href="#">vaccination</a> schedules. <a href="#">People 12 years and older</a> are eligible for boosters.</p> <p>“Consistent with how public health has historically viewed or even talked about how we recommend vaccines, we are now recommending that individuals stay up to date with additional doses that they are eligible for,” Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, the C.D.C. director, said at a White House news briefing on Wednesday.</p> <p>The C.D.C. did not change the definition of what qualifies as full vaccination — a subject of intense interest to corporations, schools, state health departments and professional sports leagues, which have themselves been reconsidering what it means to be fully vaccinated.</p> <p>“The technical definition of ‘fully vaccinated’ — two doses of an mRNA vaccine or one dose of the J &amp; J vaccine — has not changed,” Kristen Nordlund, a C.D.C. spokeswoman, said in a statement. “Individuals are considered fully vaccinated once they have received their primary series.”</p> <p>She added that the agency recommend that people “stay ‘up to date’ by receiving any additional doses they are eligible for, according to C.D.C.’s recommendations, to ensure they have optimal protection.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 USPS seeks waiver vaccine requirement</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/05/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#us-postal-service-wants-a-waiver-from-the-federal-vaccine-requirement">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/05/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#us-postal-service-wants-a-waiver-from-the-federal-vaccine-requirement</a>
GIST	<p>The United States Postal Service says it wants an exemption to the federal vaccine-or-test mandate because it could hinder its ability to deliver the mail.</p> <p>“The Postal Service is seeking temporary relief because it wants to ensure that its ability to deliver mail and packages is not hindered amid the current disruptions in the nation’s supply chain,” Darlene Casey, a U.S.P.S. spokeswoman, said in a statement on Wednesday.</p> <p>In November, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration <a href="#">issued</a> an emergency order requiring that organizations with more than 100 employees require their workers to either be vaccinated against Covid-19 or be tested weekly and subjected to stricter face-covering requirements.</p> <p>The U.S.P.S. formally requested a variance from that order in a letter to OSHA dated Tuesday.</p> <p>“We are now in the middle of our peak season (mid-October through January), which is our busiest and most challenging time of year,” Deputy Postmaster General Doug A. Tulino wrote in the letter, a copy of</p>

	<p>which was provided to The New York Times. “The American people are relying on us to timely deliver their mail and packages throughout the holiday season — which aren’t limited to holiday packages but include critical items like Treasury checks, Covid-19 tests and pharmaceuticals.”</p> <p>He added that the mandate was “likely to result in the loss of many employees” just when they are needed most. Such a loss “would have a potentially catastrophic impact on our ability to provide service to the American public when demand is at its highest,” Mr. Tulino wrote.</p> <p>The Postal Service requires all employees and contractors “who interact with the public” to wear face coverings “when there is a state, local or tribal directive in place that requires face coverings to be worn,” Mr. Tulino wrote. Face coverings are also required for employees and contractors who cannot maintain social distancing, he wrote.</p> <p>Those policies apply regardless of a person’s vaccination status, he said.</p> <p>In the last 18 months, the Postal Service has received “only a handful of citations” related to pandemic restrictions, which, Mr. Tulino wrote, “illustrates that the Postal Service’s established Covid-19 mitigation measures have been extremely successful to date.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Italy mandates vaccine people 50 and older</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/05/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#italy-makes-covid-vaccines-mandatory-for-everyone-50-and-older">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/05/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#italy-makes-covid-vaccines-mandatory-for-everyone-50-and-older</a>
GIST	<p>The Italian government made Covid-19 vaccination mandatory for people 50 and older on Wednesday, as it sought to curb the explosive growth in new cases because of the Omicron variant.</p> <p>The government also approved rules that prevent the unvaccinated from entering businesses, including banks, post offices and some stores. Previously, workers older than 50 could show proof of a negative test to do their jobs. Now they will have to be vaccinated or show proof they have recovered from an infection. The measures go into effect on Feb. 15.</p> <p>“We want to curb the growth of infections and push the Italians who haven’t gotten vaccinated yet to do so,” Italy’s prime minister, Mario Draghi, said in a statement on Wednesday. “We are targeting in particular age groups that are at higher risk of being hospitalized to reduce the pressure on hospitals and save lives.”</p> <p>Mr. Draghi added that the government’s goal was to keep hospitals working while, at the same time, keeping schools and businesses open. With new infections rising fast, scientists fear that hospitals may soon have to shut down regular activities to devote beds and personnel to Covid patients.</p> <p>Almost 7 percent of Italians over 50 are estimated to have not received any vaccination yet. Vaccination rates are high in Italy, the first country outside China to be severely hit by the pandemic. But there still are millions of unvaccinated people.</p> <p>The government also set aside 92.5 million euros for free rapid testing in schools to lessen the impact of the virus and avoid the massive use of remote learning, the education minister, Patrizio Bianchi, said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Govt. to reimburse rapid at-home test costs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/05/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#white-house-rapid-tests-reimbursement">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/01/05/world/omicron-covid-vaccine-tests#white-house-rapid-tests-reimbursement</a>
GIST	President Biden’s coronavirus response coordinator said Wednesday that, beginning next week, Americans struggling to get tested for the coronavirus will be able to have the cost of rapid at-home tests reimbursed by their insurers, but offered no specific promises about when free tests would be available.

The remarks by Jeff Zients, who leads the White House pandemic response, come two weeks after [Mr. Biden said](#) his administration would buy half a billion rapid tests to distribute free to the public, and that insurance companies would begin reimbursing people for tests they purchased on their own. Mr. Biden said at the time that the free tests would be available “in the coming weeks.”

With the Omicron variant of the coronavirus fueling a sharp rise in cases across the country, demand for all kinds of tests is far outpacing supply. In some areas, people are waiting in long lines to take the highly sensitive polymerase chain reaction, or P.C.R., tests that are administered at medical clinics. Rapid at-home tests are flying off pharmacy shelves.

“We know this remains frustrating for people getting tested in many parts of the country,” Mr. Zients said on Wednesday. “So we are working to do all we can.”

The administration’s new “test to stay” guidance for schools, in which students exposed to the virus can remain in the classroom if they test negative, is among the factors driving up demand for the rapid tests.

Last week, when Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [omitted a testing requirement from new isolation guidelines](#), she was greeted [with a chorus of criticism from public health experts](#) who said a negative test should be required before an infected person ends a five-day isolation period.

On Tuesday, the C.D.C. [amended the latest guidance](#) — not to say that testing was required, but to say that people who wanted to end their isolation periods after five days and had access to tests may choose to take them. If the test results are positive, they should stay home for another five days, the guidance says; if negative, and their symptoms are resolving, they may go out, but should continue to wear masks in public for another five days.

Addressing reporters on Wednesday, Dr. Walensky said she omitted a testing requirement from the guidance because rapid tests are not authorized by the Food and Drug Administration to determine whether someone is infectious to others; they are authorized merely to detect infection, and are meant to be used serially, as is the case in schools.

But after the guidance was released, she said, “it became very clear that people were interested in using the rapid tests,” and since that was the case, she at least wanted to “provide guidance on how they should be used.”

The recommendation for the general public is different from the one for health care workers, who are required to test negative before going back to work. Dr. Walensky said the C.D.C. was always more conservative in its recommendations for health workers, because they care for vulnerable people, including those with weak immune systems.

Matching testing supply with demand has been a challenge for both the Trump and Biden administrations. Early in the pandemic, there was a shortage of tests and the components that make up test kits. By late 2020, manufacturers had expanded production. But once vaccines arrived, the Biden administration put less emphasis on testing. Demand plunged, and manufacturers pulled back.

Now the manufacturers are running at full speed again. Mr. Zients said manufacturers would begin delivering rapid tests kits to the federal government next week, and that the administration would set up a “free and easy system, including a website” where Americans could order them.

Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, told reporters on Wednesday that new federal testing sites would open this week in the District of Columbia and Philadelphia, followed soon after by Maine, Maryland, Nevada, Delaware, Texas and Washington state. She noted that mobile testing sites were already open in New York City and New Jersey.

HEADLINE	01/05 Philadelphia rowhouse fire leaves 12 dead
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/philadelphia-rowhouse-fire.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/philadelphia-rowhouse-fire.html</a>
GIST	<p>PHILADELPHIA — Neighbors, awakened by screams, looked out their windows at the cold dark morning. Flames were pouring out of the second-story windows of a rowhouse on 23rd Street as people on the block watched in horror.</p> <p>Firefighters arrived just before sunrise and fought the blaze for nearly an hour. They discovered what neighbors had feared: There had been people inside, a lot of them.</p> <p>Twelve were killed in the fire, including eight children, according to the Philadelphia mayor's office. Craig Murphy, the deputy fire commissioner, said that two others who were hurt were taken to nearby hospitals.</p> <p>At a news conference down the street from the charred building, Mayor Jim Kenney, the son of a firefighter, seemed almost at a loss for words. "This is, without a doubt, one of the most tragic days in our city's history," he said. "Losing so many kids is just devastating."</p> <p>As the sun set on Wednesday, Jacuita Purifoy stood before reporters on the street and said that three of her sisters were among the dead, along with her nieces and nephews.</p> <p>"I've been in and out of conscious all day," said Ms. Purifoy, who heard the news at around 7 a.m. The only member of the family who lived in the building that Ms. Purifoy knew to have survived was a 5-year-old boy. He was in a hospital in stable condition, she said, and asking about his family.</p> <p>"They was somebody," Ms. Purifoy said of her sisters. "They was relevant, they was somebody who was supposed to continue life and die at an old age, not from stuff that could have been avoided."</p> <p>Officials said they did not yet know the cause of the fire, though an investigation was underway. It was among the deadliest residential fires in the country's recent history, including a 2019 fire that killed five children at a day care center in Erie, Pa., and a 2018 fire at an apartment building in Chicago that left 10 children dead.</p> <p>The century-old, three-story brick rowhouse belonged to the Philadelphia Housing Authority, which bought it in 1967, according to property records. It had been divided into two units: one on the first floor and half of the second; the other sharing the second floor and taking up the third. Altogether, Mr. Murphy said, it appeared that 26 people were in the building at the time of the fire, eight in the lower unit and 18 in the upper one.</p> <p>"That is a tremendous amount of people to be living in a duplex," said Mr. Murphy, though he emphasized that this was not a definitive number. He said that eight people who were in the building escaped the fire on their own.</p> <p>The city had initially reported the death toll as 13, including seven children, but revised both figures on Wednesday evening.</p> <p>An official with the housing authority said it was unclear why so many people were in the building. This would have been "too high" a number of occupants for an apartment, Dinesh Indala, the executive vice president for housing operations at the housing authority, told reporters. He did not specify how many people could legally live in the unit, and also cautioned that much was still unknown about who was inside at the time of the fire.</p> <p>"It's the holidays," he said. "I don't know if they had people coming and visiting. I have no idea."</p> <p>Jenna Collins, a housing lawyer with Community Legal Services in Philadelphia, said the maximum occupancy for the largest units operated by the housing authority was 12 people. But she said that</p>



complications of life can render the rules less than hard-and-fast at times; for example, if a person in a unit suddenly gains custody of several children, the family is typically not evicted while waiting for a larger place to open up.

In any case, as the mayor and others cautioned, it was too early to make any judgments about the living arrangements in the apartment.

“You don’t know the circumstances of each and every family,” Mr. Kenney said at the news conference. “Maybe there were people or relatives that needed to be sheltered.”

Mr. Murphy said that the apartments had smoke detectors but of those that responders found, “none of them operated.”

Both apartments had been inspected by the housing authority within the past year, officials said. In a statement, Kelvin Jeremiah, the president of the housing authority, said that all smoke detectors had been found to be working when the property was inspected in May 2021.

Officials said it was too early to say why they apparently did not work on Wednesday — a problem that has apparently bedeviled the housing authority for some time.

“I don’t know if they were replaced or tampered with — we have no idea,” Mr. Indala said.

Darrell L. Clarke, the president of the Philadelphia City Council, said that larger public housing complexes in the city require hard-wired smoke detectors, but that these were battery-operated.

Mr. Clarke represents the district where the fire happened and said that several of the children who died were students at a nearby elementary school, where families gathered on Wednesday morning.

“It is really a gut punch, not only to the family members but to the community and the city of Philadelphia,” he said.

Fairmount is a mostly gentrified neighborhood of modest brick rowhouses that sits north and east of some of the city’s most prestigious museums and just south of Brewerytown, a poorer neighborhood. For some living on the block where the fire broke out, the morning unfolded in a series of shocks: the blaze itself, the death toll and the discoveries about the lives of their neighbors.

“I had no idea there were that many people in the building,” said Laurie Roma, 44, who lives across the street from the blaze and had awakened to the sound of screaming. “I knew there were kids that resided in the home. I knew it was a P.H.A. home. And I just was hoping that everyone got out.”

She said that she had tried calling 911 that morning but no one answered, and that a neighbor also said there had been trouble getting through. A spokesman for the city said 911 had received the first calls about the fire at 6:36 a.m. and fielded dozens of calls after that. The first firefighters arrived on the scene at 6:40.

But for 12 people it was already too late.

“We just were, you know, coming together stronger than previous,” Ms. Purifoy said on Wednesday evening. The family had recently lost their father, she said, which had brought them even closer. “We always stayed together because we were a family. We weren’t just, you know, people that’s just out here saying, ‘Oh that’s my cousin, that’s my sister’ and then they don’t know what’s going on in each other’s life.”

Up the street from the burned-out building, Sumara Wright, 18, stood outside the elementary school, having walked over that morning to pick up laptops for her siblings so they could work remotely. A teacher told her about the fire, and that one of the victims was Ms. Wright’s close friend and classmate. He and his siblings had been in the building that morning.



	"It was heartbreaking," Ms. Wright said. "I had just seen him two days ago riding his bike."
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Winter weather alerts, advisories: 38 states</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/millions-americans-winter-weather-alerts-storms-arctic-blast/story?id=82083998">https://abcnews.go.com/US/millions-americans-winter-weather-alerts-storms-arctic-blast/story?id=82083998</a>
GIST	<p>More than 100 million people across the United States are on alert this week for heavy snow, brutally cold temperatures, gusty winds and icy conditions.</p> <p>As of Wednesday afternoon, the National Weather Service has issued various advisories, alerts, watches and warnings for 38 states -- from Washington to New York -- related to <a href="#">two winter storm systems</a>.</p> <p>The first is currently in the Upper Midwest region, bringing snow and wind across the Northern Plains and Great Lakes. The second is in the Pacific Northwest and Northern Rocky Mountains, bringing rain and wind to the West Coast and heavy snow to the nearby mountain ranges, from the Cascades to the Rockies. This storm could reach the East Coast by Friday morning, bringing <a href="#">more snow</a> to the areas along Interstate 95, one of the busiest travel corridors in the country.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the first storm will continue to sweep the Great Lakes region, with the heaviest snowfall in parts of Wisconsin, Michigan and western New York. A frigid arctic blast with wind chill temperatures well below zero degrees Fahrenheit will move in behind it, according to the latest forecast. As the cold front swings through the East, temperatures will be mild enough to keep most precipitation in the form of rain showers across the Northeastern states.</p> <p>However, drizzles of freezing rain are possible Wednesday morning from eastern Virginia to Connecticut before likely changing to rain showers by mid-morning due to warmer temperatures. This could create icy road conditions for morning commuters.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the second storm will continue to move from West to East across the Rockies, with heavy snow in the mountains and gusty winds hitting Wyoming and Colorado. The system may redevelop in the Southern central states on Thursday, according to the latest forecast. Both long-term storm models, European and American, are predicting snow across the Northeast region on Thursday night into Friday morning.</p> <p>Hundreds of people were stranded in a massive traffic jam across a 48-mile stretch of Interstate 95 in Virginia, following a multi-vehicle accident that occurred Monday afternoon amid a heavy snowstorm. Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine <a href="#">told ABC News</a> it took him almost 27 hours to drive from his Richmond home to the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C. I-95 in Virginia reopened Tuesday night at about 9 p.m. local time, after being closed for emergency response for most of the day.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Saudi-led coalition targets Yemen's capital</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/5/saudi-led-coalition-strikes-targets-in-yemens-capital">https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/5/saudi-led-coalition-strikes-targets-in-yemens-capital</a>
GIST	<p>The Saudi-led coalition has launched air attacks in Yemen's capital Sanaa in response to a United Arab Emirates-flagged vessel in the Red Sea being seized and drone attacks launched by Yemeni Houthi fighters earlier this week.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Saudi state TV reported the coalition as saying it destroyed workshops and warehouses for drones.</p> <p>Saudi Arabian air defences intercepted and destroyed five drones launched by the Iran-aligned Houthi movement towards the kingdom on Monday, as the rebels based in the key Red Sea port of Hodeidah <a href="#">seized the UAE-flagged Rwabee ship</a> claiming it contained military materials.</p>

The seized ship is being held in the Houthi-held port of Salif, north of Hodeidah, and some 60km (37 miles) from the border with Saudi Arabia.

The coalition said the vessel was in international waters when it was seized, and was carrying “medical field equipment” meant for the construction of a hospital on the Yemeni archipelago of Socotra.

The Houthis, meanwhile, claim that the boat was in Yemeni waters “without authorisation” and carrying military materials.

On Wednesday, the Yemen Petroleum Company (YPC) said the Saudi-led coalition diverted to a Saudi port a fifth fuel vessel heading for the Houthi-controlled port of Hodeidah.

Essam al-Mutawakkal, who heads the YPC in Houthi areas, said five such fuel ships that had received United Nations clearances to enter Yemen were currently being detained by the coalition.

Hodeidah has been a lifeline entry point for aid supplies to Yemen’s largely rebel-held north, including Sanaa.

[Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen’s war in 2015](#) to support the internationally recognised government against the Houthis.

The UAE is a member of the Saudi-led coalition and has not publicly reacted to the incident, the first of its kind in more than two years.

In November 2019, the Houthis [seized two South Korean vessels](#) and a Saudi-flagged tug in the Red Sea a few miles off Uqban island, north of Hodeidah.

The war in Yemen has turned an already poor country into one of the [world’s most devastating humanitarian disasters](#).

The United Nations has estimated the war killed 377,000 people by the end of 2021, both directly and indirectly through hunger and disease.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Co-infections: flu + coronavirus = flurona</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2022/01/05/flu-and-covid-flurona-real-and-doctors-expect-see-more/9087211002/">https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2022/01/05/flu-and-covid-flurona-real-and-doctors-expect-see-more/9087211002/</a>
GIST	<p>"Flurona."</p> <p>The name conjures images of cheap cable horror flicks – think “Sharknado” – but flu-COVID dual infections are real. More cases are likely. And they’re not nearly as terrifying as flying sharks – especially for people who are vaccinated against one or both.</p> <p>Texas Children’s Hospital announced this week that tests confirmed a child was infected with influenza A and SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The patient was not hospitalized and is recovering at home, the hospital said.</p> <p>No other details were given.</p> <p>“This is one confirmed case and, of course, we’ll be working with our colleagues across the country to see if there are more cases and whether we will see a distinct pattern in these cases,” Dr. Jim Versalovic, pathologist-in-chief and COVID-19 command center co-leader at the hospital, told reporters Monday.</p> <p>The announcement comes a few days after Israel reported its first confirmed “flurona” case in an unvaccinated pregnant woman at the Beilinson Hospital in Petah Tikva, <a href="#">the Times of Israel reports</a>.</p>

Health experts expect to see more “flurona” amid rapidly rising flu and coronavirus cases, the latter being driven by the highly contagious omicron variant. [And this isn't the first time health care providers have seen co-infections of the flu and COVID-19](#), as well as other viruses.

Texas Children’s Hospital was also the first children’s hospital in the U.S. to report a co-infection of COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, in the summer. Versalovic said dozens of children with co-infections required hospitalization.

But there's no specific treatment or vaccine for RSV, so experts speculate children with "flurona" may experience better outcomes.

“I expect to see plenty of co-infections (of flu and COVID-19) going forward, but I don’t see anything that suggests it makes COVID infections worse,” said Dr. Frank Esper, a physician at the Cleveland Clinic Children’s Center for Pediatric Infectious Diseases. “Those are two viral pathogens that we actually have medicines for.”

In addition to lifesaving vaccines to prevent severe illness, he said, health care providers are prepared to treat the infections simultaneously with Tamiflu and remdesivir.

Immunocompromised people are vulnerable to these infections, but co-infections are more likely to occur in young children, experts say, because their immune system is still unfamiliar with many common viruses.

“Hands down, the No. 1 predisposition for having more than one virus at the same time is your age, and it’s really children under 5,” Esper said. “They all have virus running rampant and swap them like trading cards.”

Cold viruses make up the most commonly seen co-infection cases, Esper said, whereas co-infections with influenza are observed less frequently.

“There are certain pathogens that don’t like to dance with anyone, and influenza is one of them,” he said. “When the body gets infected (with the flu virus), it really starts flooding the whole system with a lot of immune components that prevent viral infection,” making it harder for other pathogens to enter the body and cause illness.

Co-infections involving the flu may be rarer than other viruses, but health experts still expect to see rising cases of “flurona” as the U.S. approaches peak flu activity. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only about 43% of children 6 months to 17 years have been vaccinated for the flu as of Dec. 4.

Texas Children’s Hospital said it has diagnosed more than 90 flu cases since Thanksgiving. Meanwhile, weekly COVID-19 cases have doubled amid the spread of the omicron variant.

“During the weekend, we shattered prior records that were established during the delta surge in August,” Versalovic said. “Just in a span of two to three weeks, we saw the tremendous impact of omicron overtaking delta.”

It’s still unclear if “flurona” causes more severe disease, but health experts don’t want to take any chances. They urge Americans to get vaccinated against both viruses as soon as possible.

The flu vaccine is available to children over 6 months, and the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine is available to children 5 and older.

“Influenza vaccination is the best preventive measure against getting infected and preventing some of the serious influenza associated complications,” said Dr. Gregg Sylvester, chief medical officer at Seqirus, an

	influenza vaccine manufacturer headquartered in New Jersey. “A flu vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and those around you from the virus.”
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## Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 New: apps report \$600 transactions to IRS</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10372327/Venmo-PayPal-Cash-App-report-transactions-totaling-600-IRS.html">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10372327/Venmo-PayPal-Cash-App-report-transactions-totaling-600-IRS.html</a>
GIST	<p>President Biden's IRS is cracking down on payments made through third-party apps, requiring platforms like Venmo, PayPal and Cash App to report transactions if they exceed \$600 in one year.</p> <p>The new reporting requirement will ensure that small businesses that receive payments through those apps are paying their fair share in taxes on them.</p> <p>Beginning Jan. 1, 2022, third-party payment processors were required to report such transactions. Though businesses were always required to self-report such incomes to the IRS, many often did not keep record of their smaller transactions.</p> <p>The payment apps were previously required to send users 1099-K forms if their gross income exceeded \$20,000 or they had more than 200 transactions per year.</p> <p>The new tax law was part of the March 2021 American Rescue Plan, which passed with no Republican votes.</p> <p>The new rule is only for goods and services transactions, not personal, such as paying a roommate for rent or reimbursing a friend. It also excludes anyone selling a personal item at a loss, such as a couch bought for \$700 and sold for \$650.</p> <p>The cash apps will now be required to send the 1099-K form to businesses with electronic transactions greater than \$600. The new change will apply for the 2022 tax season.</p> <p>'For the 2022 tax year, you should consider the amounts shown on your 1099-K when calculating gross receipts for your income tax return,' PayPal warned on its website. 'The IRS will be able to cross-reference both our report and yours.'</p> <p>The new tax rule is separate from a proposed IRS reporting requirement that originally would have handed over transaction data on accounts with more than \$600 aggregate inflow and outflow. That proposal, originally part of President Biden's Build Back Better plan, was raised to a \$10,000 threshold after much pushback, and has not yet been acted on by Congress.</p> <p>Republicans have said that that proposal amounts to the Biden administration peering into Americans' everyday purchases.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Albuquerque area hit by ransomware attack</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://therecord.media/albuquerque-impacted-by-ransomware-attack-on-bernalillo-county-government/">https://therecord.media/albuquerque-impacted-by-ransomware-attack-on-bernalillo-county-government/</a>
GIST	<p>County government buildings and public offices were closed on Wednesday across the cities of Albuquerque, Los Ranchos, and Tijeras after a ransomware attack crippled the IT network of the Bernalillo County government.</p> <p>“The disruption likely occurred between Midnight and 5:30 a.m. on Jan. 5,” county officials said in a <a href="#">press release</a> on Wednesday.</p>

The attack has primarily cut off county employees from accessing local government databases, which has made working with the public impossible. All public offices of any sort have been closed down early Wednesday as a result.

IT systems and public offices are expected to remain closed throughout Thursday and the rest of the week as well, as officials deal with the cyberattack's aftermath.

Public safety services, like the 911 call center, the Sheriff's Office, and Fire and Rescue services are operating normally, taking calls and responding to emergencies, officials said.

Other services that don't need constant access to government and citizen data are also operating using contingency plans, such as community centers, the Metropolitan Detention Center, Planning and Development Services (PDS), and the Behavioral Health department.

While all Bernalillo County websites are offline because of the ransomware attack, officials said that citizens could make tax payments via the Treasurer's Office website, which uses a separate [online portal](#).

Albuquerque is the largest city in the state of New Mexico and the [32nd largest in the US](#).

It now joins a select list of US cities that have been hit by ransomware attacks, a list that also includes [Atlanta](#), [Baltimore](#), [Denver](#), [Knoxville](#), [New Orleans](#), and [Tulsa](#). The city of [Las Vegas](#) could have also joined the list, but its IT team narrowly avoided falling victim to an attack in January 2020.

Bernalillo County officials said they have taken offline any system that has been impacted by the ransomware attack and are now working with law enforcement to investigate and track down the culprits.

The name of the ransomware strain that has infected the county's systems is currently unknown, along with other technical details such as how the attackers could have gained access to the county's systems.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Natural disasters expose financial firms</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/backup-and-recovery/natural-disasters-expose-cyber-weaknesses-for-financial-firms">https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/backup-and-recovery/natural-disasters-expose-cyber-weaknesses-for-financial-firms</a>
GIST	<p>When storms, hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires and other natural disasters strike, they impact life across wide swaths of the country. They also impact the ability to access financial services and the potential for bad actors to get in amid the chaos.</p> <p>As seen recently with the tornados in Kentucky and the snow and ice-storms across the country, natural disasters can bring in-person banking to a standstill, preventing access to bank branches and staff, as well as the systems to back up transactions. An academic white paper released in mid2021 by VoxEU looked at the potential impact of natural disasters on the overall financial system, especially in the face of the on-going <a href="#">COVID pandemic</a>, and found that "natural disasters are a major source of systemic risk, and finance must play a major role in the prevention and taming of those risks."</p> <p>Indeed, going into the "hurricane season" this year from late summer into fall, the FDIC released notice about how natural disasters might affect financial services institutions (FSIs).</p> <p>David Blaszkowsky, head of product and regulatory affairs for Helios Data, points out that super-Storm Sandy nearly a decade ago [in fall 2012] remains the nightmare baseline for how future natural disasters can threaten to impact not just to individual local financial institutions, but the national financial system. "Lose a bank and the state and federal regulators can reconstruct things quickly, but when scores or hundreds go down at the same time the system can collapse," he said.</p>

Adding to this, the failure of electronic systems like ATMs and inability to travel or even rescue and replace lost systems and records, as has happened across lower Manhattan during Sandy, and “the inability for people to get money will quickly mean pain and loss of face across a region,” he added. “Now is the time for FSIs, even for local ones, to build the resilience to survive regional disasters.”

According to analysts at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), 2020 was the fourth-costliest year on record for natural disasters. And, as of early July 2021 there have been eight weather or climate disaster events with losses exceeding \$1 billion each to affect the United States, according to NOAA’s findings. While these physical and human losses do not directly equate to financial industry impact, there is nonetheless a correlation — with branches in these areas unable to operate, and digital systems often downed.

Gary McAlum, senior cyber analyst with the TAG Cyber Group, and a member of the board of directors of the National Cybersecurity Center, said that the responsibilities placed upon financial services organizations boils down to business continuity and “resiliency.”

In many ways, the pandemic itself and the subsequent lockdown and remote work requirements represent “a natural disaster,” said McAlum, with the ongoing push to have more employees (including FSI employees) to work from home. “Every financial institution goes through their own list of how a natural disaster could impact them,” McAlum said. “When something like this happens, banks need to track their [third-party suppliers](#) as they will be increasingly reliant on those providers.”

As Blaszkowsky pointed out, “Lose a bank and the state and federal regulators can reconstruct things quickly, but when scores or hundreds go down at the same time the system can collapse.”

“Add [to this] the failure of electronic systems like ATMs and inability to travel or even rescue and replace lost systems and records, like it was across lower Manhattan” in recent natural disasters, he said. “Now is the time for FSIs, even local ones, to build the resilience to survive regional disasters.”

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HEADLINE	01/06 France regulators fine Google, Facebook
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.securityweek.com/france-hits-google-facebook-huge-fines-over-cookies">https://www.securityweek.com/france-hits-google-facebook-huge-fines-over-cookies</a>
GIST	<p>French regulators have hit Google and Facebook with 210 million euros (\$237 million) in fines over their use of "cookies", the data used to track users online, authorities said Thursday.</p> <p>The 150-million-euro fine imposed on Google was a record by France's National Commission for Information Technology and Freedom (CNIL), beating a previous cookie-related fine of 100 million euros against the company in December 2020.</p> <p>Facebook was handed a 60-million-euro fine.</p> <p>"CNIL has determined that the sites facebook.com, google.fr and youtube.com do not allow users to refuse the use of cookies as simply as to accept them," the regulatory body said.</p> <p>The two platforms have three months to adapt their practices, after which France will impose fines of 100,000 euros per day, CNIL added.</p> <p>Google told AFP it would change its practices following the ruling.</p> <p>"In accordance with the expectations of internet users... we are committed to implementing new changes, as well as to working actively with CNIL in response to its decision," the US firm said in a statement.</p> <p>Cookies are little packets of data that are set up on a user's computer when they visit a website, allowing web browsers to save information about their session.</p>



	<p>They are highly valuable for Google and Facebook as ways to personalise advertising -- their primary source of revenue.</p> <p>But privacy advocates have long pushed back and a European Union law passed in 2018 placed strict rules on internet companies, obliging them to seek the direct consent of users before installing cookies on their computers.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Guilty plea: \$50M investment fraud scheme</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/man-pleads-guilty-50m-investment/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/man-pleads-guilty-50m-investment/</a>
GIST	<p>A Californian man has admitted his part in a \$50m conspiracy to defraud scores of investors via lookalike scam websites.</p> <p>Allen Giltman, 56, of Irvine, pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit securities fraud.</p> <p>For eight years up to October 2020, he's said to have conspired with others to build and run websites to solicit funds from investors. Many were designed to look like legitimate sites run by financial institutions or non-existent but legitimate-seeming companies.</p> <p>To enhance the sites' legitimacy, the conspirators would falsely claim their 'institutions' were regulated by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA), the Securities Investor Protection Corporation and the New York Stock Exchange.</p> <p>They claimed deposits would be protected and used real names and logos of the companies they impersonated.</p> <p>Lured in by higher-than-average rates of return on their certificates of deposit (CDs), the victims usually found the sites via internet searches, according to the <a href="#">Department of Justice (DoJ)</a>.</p> <p>Giltman typically fielded introductory calls and emails from these victims, impersonating real FINRA broker-dealers using their names and FINRA Central Registration Depository numbers. He then provided would-be investors with application forms and instructions on how to wire funds for CD purchases.</p> <p>In reality, no investor ever received a CD, and their funds were apparently moved to various international bank accounts in Russia, Georgia, Hong Kong, and Turkey.</p> <p>Investigators identified around 70 victims of the nationwide scheme and as many as 150 scam sites.</p> <p>Giltman faces a maximum jail term of 25 years and will be forced to pay \$500,000 or twice the gross amount of gain or loss from each offense, whichever is greater. He is also facing a civil complaint filed yesterday by the SEC.</p> <p>Investment fraud is among the highest-grossing cybercrimes, according to the FBI. <a href="#">It revealed that</a> over \$336m was lost to fraudsters in 2020, more than any other crime type bar romance scams and business email compromise.</p> <p>Over 8700 victims were identified during the reporting period.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 'Elephant Beetle' steals millions over time</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/elephant-beetle-spends-months-in-victim-networks-to-divert-transactions/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/elephant-beetle-spends-months-in-victim-networks-to-divert-transactions/</a>



A financially-motivated actor dubbed 'Elephant Beetle' is stealing millions of dollars from organizations worldwide using an arsenal of over 80 unique tools and scripts.

The group is very sophisticated and patient, spending months studying the victim's environment and financial transaction processes, and only then moves to exploit flaws in the operation.

The actors inject fraudulent transactions into the network and steal small amounts over long periods, leading to an overall theft of millions of dollars. If they are spotted, they lay low for a while and return through a different system.

The expertise of 'Elephant Beetle' appears to be in targeting legacy Java applications on Linux systems, which is typically their entry point to corporate networks.

The actor's TTPs are exposed in a detailed technical report which the Sygnia Incident Response team shared with Bleeping Computer before publication.

### **Exploiting flaws and blending with normal traffic**

'Elephant Beetle' prefers to target known and likely unpatched vulnerabilities instead of buying or developing zero-day exploits.

Sygnia researchers have observed the group for two years and can confirm the the threat actors exploiting the following flaws:

- Primefaces Application Expression Language Injection (CVE-2017-1000486)
- WebSphere Application Server SOAP Deserialization Exploit (CVE-2015-7450)
- SAP NetWeaver Invoker Servlet Exploit (CVE-2010-5326)
- SAP NetWeaver ConfigServlet Remote Code Execution (EDB-ID-24963)

All four of the above flaws enable the actors to execute arbitrary code remotely via a specially crafted and obfuscated web shell.

The actors need to conduct long-term surveillance and research, so the next primary goal is to remain undetected for several months.

To achieve this, they try to blend with regular traffic by mimicking legitimate packages, disguising web shells as font, image, or CSS and JS resources, and using WAR archives to pack payloads.

"The Elephant Beetle thieves will also try and literally overwrite non-threatening files, as they slowly prepare for the true attack," details the [Sygnia report](#).

"Another technique that was used by the threat actor was modifying or replacing completely the default web page files. – i.e., replacing the iisstart.aspx or default.aspx on IIS web servers."

"Using this technique allowed the threat group two things – the first is an almost guaranteed access to their web shell from other servers or from the internet, because the routes for this are often allowed by default."

### **Moving laterally through custom backdoors**

After the first web server has been compromised, the threat actor uses a custom Java scanner that fetches a list of IP addresses for a specific port or HTTP interface.

This tool is highly versatile and configurable, and Sygnia reports seeing it used extensively in the observed 'Elephant Beetle' operations.

Having identified potential internal server pivoting points, the actors use compromised credentials or RCE flaws to spread laterally to other devices in the network.

	<p>The group uses two one-liner backdoors that facilitate lateral movement; a Base64 encoded PowerShell and a Perl back-connect backdoor.</p> <p>The first backdoor simulates a web server and binds a remote code execution channel to target ports, while the second one executes an interactive shell for C2 communication (command reception and output).</p> <p>In some rare cases, the hackers used a third backdoor for shellcode execution on the host via an encrypted tunnel created using a set of hardcoded certificates.</p> <p><b>Attribution and defense tips</b></p> <p>'Elephant Beetle' uses Spanish code variables and file names, and the majority of the C2 IP addresses they use are based in Mexico.</p> <p>Also, the Java-written network scanner was uploaded to Virus Total from Argentina, probably during the early development and testing phase.</p> <p>As such, the group appears to be connected to Latin America and may have a relation or overlap with the <a href="#">actor FIN13</a>, tracked by Mandiant.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 NY OAG: 1.1M customer accounts stolen</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ny-oag-hackers-stole-11-million-customer-accounts-from-17-companies/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ny-oag-hackers-stole-11-million-customer-accounts-from-17-companies/</a>
GIST	<p>The New York State Office of the Attorney General (NY OAG) has warned 17 well-known companies that roughly 1.1 million of their customers have had their user accounts compromised in credential stuffing attacks.</p> <p>In such attacks, threat actors make automated and repeated attempts (millions at a time) to access user accounts using credentials (usually user/password pairs) stolen from other online services.</p> <p>This tactic works particularly well against the accounts of those who reuse their credentials across multiple platforms.</p> <p>The attackers' end goal is to gain access to as many accounts as possible to steal the associated personal and financial information that can be sold on hacking forums or the dark web.</p> <p>The threat actors can also use the info themselves in various identity theft scams or make unauthorized purchases.</p> <p>NY OAG discovered these compromised online accounts after a "sweeping investigation" over several months after monitoring multiple online communities dedicated to sharing validated credentials harvested in previously undetected credential stuffing attacks.</p> <p>"After reviewing thousands of posts, the OAG compiled login credentials for customer accounts at 17 well-known companies, which included online retailers, restaurant chains, and food delivery services," NY OAG <a href="#">said</a> today.</p> <p>"In all, the OAG collected credentials for more than 1.1 million customer accounts, all of which appeared to have been compromised in credential stuffing attacks.</p> <p>"Following discovery of the attacks, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) alerted the relevant companies so that passwords could be reset and consumers could be notified."</p> <p>According to an Akamai report published in May 2021, the company observed over <a href="#">193 billion credential stuffing attacks globally</a> in 2020, with a 45% growth over the previous year.</p>

	<p>Digital Shadows also reported last year that report <a href="#">more than 15 billion credentials</a> are currently being shared or sold online, most of them belonging to consumers.</p> <p>This massive cache of circulating compromised credentials is behind a recent rise in credential stuffing attacks.</p> <p>"Right now, there are more than 15 billion stolen credentials being circulated across the internet, as users' personal information stand in jeopardy," <a href="#">said New York Attorney General Letitia James</a>.</p> <p>"Businesses have the responsibility to take appropriate action to protect their customers' online accounts and this guide lays out critical safeguards companies can use in the fight against credential stuffing. We must do everything we can to protect consumers' personal information and their privacy."</p> <p>Today, NY OAG also published <a href="#">a report</a> providing further details on its credential stuffing investigation and how companies can protect their customers and respond to such incidents.</p> <p>For instance, companies are advised to implement bot detection services, multi-factor authentication, and password-less authentication and monitor customer traffic for signs of attacks (e.g., spikes in traffic volume or failed login attempts).</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Honda, Acura cars hit by Y2K22 bug</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/technology/honda-acura-cars-hit-by-y2k22-bug-that-rolls-back-clocks-to-2002/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/technology/honda-acura-cars-hit-by-y2k22-bug-that-rolls-back-clocks-to-2002/</a>
GIST	<p>Honda and Acura cars have been hit with a Year 2022 bug, aka Y2K22, that resets the navigation system's clock to January 1st, 2002, with no way to change it.</p> <p>Starting on January 1st, the date on Acura and Honda navigation system would automatically change to January 1st, 2002, with the time resetting to 12:00, 2:00, 4:00, or other times based on the model or possibly the region the car is located.</p> <p>Honda and Acura car owners report that the Y2K22 bug affects almost all older cars, including <a href="#">Honda Pilot</a>, <a href="#">Odyssey</a>, <a href="#">CRV</a>, Ridgeline, Odyssey and Acura <a href="#">MDX</a>, <a href="#">RDX</a>, CSX, and TL models.</p> <p>While it is unclear what is causing the Honda/Acura bug, this past weekend, <a href="#">Microsoft Exchange was hit by a Y2K22 bug</a> that froze the delivery of email.</p> <p>Microsoft's bug was caused by the date being stored in an int32 variable that can hold only a maximum value of 2,147,483,647. However, dates in 2022 have a minimum value of 2,201,010,001 for January 1st, 2022, at midnight, causing the software to crash.</p> <p>The same bug may affect Honda and Acura cars, but Honda customer service has said it should resolve itself in August 2022, indicating it may be a different issue.</p> <p>"Yes, we are so sorry for the issue you are experiencing with your vehicle. We have escalated the NAVI Clock Issue to our Engineering Team and they have informed us that you will experience issue from Jan 2022 thru August 2022 and then it will auto-correct," Honda customer support <a href="#">told a car owner</a>.</p> <p>Another Honda owner was given a similar response that the issue will automatically be fixed in August 2022.</p> <p>"We're aware of the issue our engineers are looking into it. They've advised its something to do with the navi's calendar and that it will resolve itself when the date rolls over into August but they're looking for a counter measure to correct it sooner," customer support <a href="#">told another owner</a>.</p>

	<p>It is doubtful that Acura and Honda will force a car owner to wait seven months for a fix, and an update for the navigation system will likely be released to resolve the issue.</p> <p>BleepingComputer has reached out to Acura and Honda to learn more about the bug and how they plan on fixing it but have not heard back.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Health tech vendor QRS faces lawsuit</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/incident-response/health-tech-vendor-qrs-faces-lawsuit-after-data-theft-impacting-319k-patients?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/incident-response/health-tech-vendor-qrs-faces-lawsuit-after-data-theft-impacting-319k-patients?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>Technology services vendor QRS is facing a class-action lawsuit, following its The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act breach notification informing 319,778 patients that their data was possibly stolen during a hack on an electronic patient portal.</p> <p>QRS is a third-party vendor that provides electronic patient portals and related services to healthcare provider organizations.</p> <p>In early November, QRS reported that an attacker gained access to a single, dedicated patient portal server for three days in August, leading to the unauthorized access to and likely exfiltration of patient-related data. The lawsuit shows the client was Lexington Heart Specialists in Kentucky.</p> <p>No other QRS or client systems were accessed in the hack, but the impacted data included Social Security numbers, patient identification numbers, treatments, diagnoses, and other sensitive data.</p> <p>Filed in the U.S. Eastern District Court of Tennessee on Jan. 3, the lawsuit argues that the data exfiltration could have been prevented if QRS had adequately secured, monitored, and maintained the protected health information in its possession.</p> <p>The suit argues that QRS should have implemented federally recommended cybersecurity measures, which would have detected or prevented the hack. The lawsuit names a laundry list of cybersecurity measures, but it's unclear whether they were employed by QRS at the time of the incident.</p> <p>The lawsuit boldly claims the breach indicates that QRS failed to implement one or more of the measures. However, even with strong security based on industry standards, the attackers may have been able to gain access.</p> <p>QRS is also accused of negligence and/or recklessness, as well as violating federal and state regulations, as well as HIPAA.</p> <p>The lawsuit argues the two-month wait to inform patients placed them at a greater risk of identity theft. But it should be plainly noted that HIPAA requires covered entities and business associates to report breaches within 60 days of discovery, for which QRS complied.</p> <p>It also claims a number of data security failings led to the breach, including failure to take steps to prevent compromise and failure to leverage appropriate data encryption protocols and procedures. Further, the suit argues the breach "resulted from a combination of insufficiencies demonstrating [QRS] failed to comply with safeguards mandated by HIPAA."</p> <p>The breach victims allege they've suffered actual and imminent injury, such as lost or diminished value to their personal data, out-of-pocket expenses for responding to potential fraud and identity theft risks, lost time and money for recovery efforts, and continued risk to their data. They're also claiming to have experienced "emotional distress, fear, anxiety, nuisance and annoyance related to the theft and compromise of their [data]."</p>

<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>The victim who filed the lawsuit experienced identity theft shortly after the data breach and believes his data, and that of other patients, “was subsequently sold on the dark web following the data breach.”</p> <p>Shortly after the incident, the breach victim experienced more than “10 unauthorized charges on his bank account and credit card. This resulted in trips to the bank, with gas charges and consumption and mileage on his car, and additional time spent completing paperwork and discussing the issues with the bank for resolution.”</p> <p>Further, he was targeted with scams following the incident, including robocalls and texts. The fraud attempts resulted in the breach victim paying for a credit monitoring app out-of-pocket, as well as identity theft protection.</p> <p>The detailing of actual harms will be critical for the case moving forward, given the 2020 Supreme Court ruling that established concrete harm must be established for lawsuits to proceed. Individuals must have an analogue to a common law tradition; or “factual evidence” of some type of materialized actual harm.</p> <p>Lastly, the lawsuit raises concerns with the health information left under QRS control, as it “remains unencrypted and available for unauthorized third parties to access and abuse.” As long as QRS “fails to undertake appropriate and adequate measures to protect” the data remains at risk.</p> <p>As a result, the victims are seeking an injunction that would require QRS to remedy ongoing harms and better protect the data in their control. The lawsuit seeks to address the concerns and arguments raised, with particular scrutiny to QRS cybersecurity policies and tech measures.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 ICS vendors respond to Log4j flaws
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.securityweek.com/ics-vendors-respond-log4j-vulnerabilities?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.securityweek.com/ics-vendors-respond-log4j-vulnerabilities?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>SecurityWeek has compiled a list of the advisories published by industrial control system (ICS) and other industrial-related vendors in response to the recent <a href="#">Log4j vulnerabilities</a>.</p> <p>Several vulnerabilities have been discovered in the Log4j logging utility since early December, but the most important of them is CVE-2021-44228, which has been dubbed Log4Shell. Log4Shell has been exploited in many attacks by cybercriminals and state-sponsored threat actors, including <a href="#">against industrial organizations</a>.</p> <p>Major companies that provide industrial services and solutions have released advisories to inform customers about the impact of the Log4j vulnerabilities. This article presents the information that is currently available from vendors, but their advisories may be updated with additional impacted products or versions.</p> <p><a href="#">ABB</a></p> <p>ABB says it's still investigating the impact of the Log4j vulnerabilities on its products. To date, it has confirmed that its B&amp;R products and ABB Remote Access Platform (RAP) are affected. A fix has already been delivered for RAP. In the case of B&amp;R, products are affected by a less severe flaw (CVE-2021-4104) and exploitation is not possible in the default configuration.</p> <p><a href="#">Emerson</a></p> <p>Emerson has published an advisory listing many products that are not impacted by the security holes, but the company said its notification will be updated if new information emerges.</p> <p><a href="#">Honeywell</a></p> <p>Honeywell claims that only some of its Voice applications are impacted. The company's public advisory does not contain any details and instead points customers to its tech support portal for information on specific updates.</p>

### [Johnson Controls](#)

Johnson Controls is still investigating and, to date, it has only shared a list of products that are not affected.

### [Moxa](#)

Moxa is also investigating and to date it hasn't identified any products that are affected. The firm has released a list of products that it has confirmed are not impacted.

### [Phoenix Contact](#)

Phoenix Contact says only its cloud services are affected by Log4Shell, but only "partly" and remediations are being implemented. The company has determined that its physical and software products are not impacted.

### [Rockwell Automation](#)

Rockwell Automation has completed its investigation and found that the Log4j flaws impact Plex IIoT, Fiix CMMS, Warehouse Management, EIG, Industrial Data Center, VersaVirtual Application, FactoryTalk Analytics and Firewall Managed Support. The company has provided patches and mitigations, but EIG has been discontinued and no fixes are available.

### [Schneider Electric](#)

Schneider Electric has already patched the vulnerabilities in EcoStruxure IT Gateway and over a dozen of its cloud-based products. Many of the fixes developed by the company are deployed automatically and customers do not need to take any action. The industrial giant is also working on fixes for APC PowerChute, Building Advisor StarDog, and Eurotherm Data Reviewer. In the meantime, mitigations are available.

### [Siemens](#)

Siemens is still investigating, but it has already confirmed that many of its products are impacted by Log4Shell and the other Log4j vulnerabilities. The industrial giant's advisory lists over 100 affected products. The company has provided patches and mitigations.

### [Sierra Wireless](#)

Sierra Wireless has completed its review to determine the impact of the Log4j bugs and found that Log4Shell and CVE-2021-45046 do affect its AM/AMM servers and certain internal components of the AirVantage and Octave cloud platforms — although CVE-2021-45046 cannot be exploited due to the specific configuration requirements. The company is providing patches for on-premises servers.

### [WAGO](#)

WAGO says Log4j has only been found in its Smart Script labeling software, starting with version 4.2. A patch is included in version 4.8.1.4, which is already available.

Several ICS companies have informed customers that their products are not impacted, including [Inductive Automation](#), [VTScada](#), and [COPA-DATA](#).

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HEADLINE	01/05 Hackers exploit flaw fixed 9yrs-ago
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wired.com/story/zloader-microsoft-signature-verification-hack/">https://www.wired.com/story/zloader-microsoft-signature-verification-hack/</a>
GIST	<p><b>THE WIDELY USED</b> malware ZLoader crops up in all sorts of criminal hacking, from efforts that aim to steal banking passwords and other sensitive data to <a href="#">ransomware</a> attacks. Now, a ZLoader campaign that began in November has infected almost 2,200 victims in 111 countries by abusing a Windows flaw that Microsoft <a href="#">fixed</a> back in 2013.</p> <p>Hackers have long used a variety of tactics to sneak Zloader past malware detection tools. In this case, <a href="#">according to</a> researchers at security firm Check Point, the attackers took advantage of a gap in Microsoft's signature verification, the integrity check for ensuring that a file is legitimate and trustworthy.</p>



First, they'd trick victims into installing a legitimate remote IT management tool called Atera to gain access and device control; that part's not particularly surprising or novel. From there, though, the hackers still needed to install ZLoader without Windows Defender or another malware scanner detecting or blocking it.

This is where the nearly decade-old flaw came in handy. Attackers could modify a legitimate "Dynamic-link library" file—a common file shared between multiple pieces of software to load code—to plant their malware. The target DLL file is digitally signed by Microsoft, which proves its authenticity. But attackers were able to inconspicuously append a malicious script to the file without impacting Microsoft's stamp of approval.

"When you see a file like a DLL that's signed you're pretty sure that you can trust it, but this shows that's not always the case," says Kobi Eisenkraft, a malware researcher at Check Point. "I think we will see more of this method of attack."

Microsoft calls its code-signing process "Authenticode." It released a fix in 2013 that made Authenticode's signature verification stricter, to flag files that had been subtly manipulated in this way. Originally the patch was going to be pushed to all Windows users, but in July 2014 Microsoft revised its plan, making the update optional.

"As we worked with customers to adapt to this change, we determined that the impact to existing software could be high," the company [wrote](#) in 2014, meaning that the fix was causing false positives where legitimate files were flagged as potentially malicious. "Therefore, Microsoft no longer plans to enforce the stricter verification behavior as a default requirement. The underlying functionality for stricter verification remains in place, however, and can be enabled at customer discretion."

In a statement on Wednesday, Microsoft emphasized that users can protect themselves with the fix the company released in 2013. And the company noted that, as the Check Point researchers observed in the ZLoader campaign, the vulnerability can only be exploited if a device has already been compromised or attackers directly trick victims into running one of the manipulated files that appears to be signed. "Customers who apply the update and enable the configuration indicated in the security advisory will be protected," a Microsoft spokesperson told WIRED.

But while the fix is out there, and has been for all this time, many Windows devices likely don't have it enabled, since users and system administrators would need to know about the patch and then [choose to set it up](#). Microsoft noted in 2013 that the vulnerability was being actively exploited by hackers in "targeted attacks."

"We have a fix, but nobody uses it," Eisenkraft says. "As a result, a lot of malware would be able to get into companies and personal computers using this method."

The recent ZLoader attacks primarily targeted victims in the United States, Canada, and India. Other recent ZLoader attacks from an array of actors have used malicious word processing documents, tainted websites, and malicious ads to distribute the malware.

The Check Point researchers believe that this latest campaign was perpetrated by the prolific criminal hackers known as MalSmoke, because the group has a history of using similar techniques and the researchers saw some infrastructure links between this campaign and past MalSmoke hacking. MalSmoke has often had a [particular focus on malvertising](#), particularly hijacking ads on sites and services that distribute porn and other adult content. The group has used ZLoader in past campaigns as well as other malware including the popular malicious downloader called "Smoke Loader."

It's not unheard of for vulnerabilities to persist in software for many years, but when those flaws are discovered their longevity typically means that they're lurking in a large number of devices. It's also not unusual for some gadgets, particularly internet of things devices, to go unpatched even when a fix for a



	particular vulnerability is available. But this campaign represents a difficult scenario to defend against: a vulnerability with a fix so obscure that few would even know to apply it.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/04 Loggerheads: FAA, telecoms in 5G rollout</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jan/04/5g-fight-att-verizon-loggerheads-faa">https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/jan/04/5g-fight-att-verizon-loggerheads-faa</a>
GIST	<p>Late Monday, Verizon and AT&amp;T agreed to a two-week delay rolling out their new 5G technology.</p> <p>The technology was slated to launch on Wednesday, but in response to fears that the 5G service will impair airline safety – and amid threats from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to ground or divert flights at a time when the travel industry is already playing catch-up from recent weather and <a href="#">Covid-related flight disruptions</a> – the telecom companies agreed to a pause.</p> <p>Here’s what you need to know about the controversy:</p> <p><b>What is 5G?</b></p> <p>5G is the newest generation of cellular network, following 4G, which was introduced in late 2009 and is used on most US cellphones today. Nearly every 10 years since 1980, a new generation network has arrived, offering faster speeds and expanded capabilities. At the simplest level, 1G allowed for phone calls, 2G brought messaging, and 3G provided internet access. Today, on 4G, users can download apps, stream video, and more, with relative ease and speed.</p> <p>The fifth generation is expected to offer new levels of speed – making it possible, for example, to download a movie to one’s phone in seconds – and allow more devices to be connected to a network at once. The latter is increasingly important in our crowded cellular landscape. (Ever been in a concert or stadium unable to send messages?)</p> <p>“Those types of data rates could enable virtual reality applications or autonomous driving cars,” Harish Krishnaswamy, an associate professor of electrical engineering at Columbia University, told <a href="#">Live Science</a>.</p> <p><b>Why is the US airline industry concerned about 5G?</b></p> <p>To execute the upgrade, cellular networks plan to move operations on to a new band of radio frequencies called the C-Band. Last year, Verizon and AT&amp;T spent a combined \$67bn acquiring the C-Band spectrum licenses needed to upgrade their networks to 5G, according to <a href="#">Forbes</a>.</p> <p>But some aircraft regulators worry that planes’ radio altimeters, which measure how far above ground a plane is to help pilots land their crafts in low-visibility situations and also operate on C-Band frequencies, could be disturbed by 5G.</p> <p><b>Can 5G and the aviation industry coexist?</b></p> <p>The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the FAA and telecom carriers all agree that 5G and airline travel can exist together. In fact, they already do in nearly 40 countries.</p> <p>The telecom companies have pointed out that there have not been any accidents in other countries where 5G is operational and American airlines regularly fly to those countries.</p> <p>The FAA, too, has said that “5G and aviation have safely coexisted in other countries”. That’s because in those regions, “power levels have been reduced around airports and the industries have worked together prior to deployment”, the agency said in a 3 January statement.</p> <p><b>So what’s the problem in the US?</b></p> <p>The discussions over how the transition should take place in the US, however, have been brewing for years and intensified in recent months.</p>

Verizon and AT&T had initially planned to launch 5G in December and until last week, appeared unwilling to postpone it further. But amid pushes from both Steve Dickson, the head of the FAA, and the transportation secretary, [Pete Buttigieg](#), to delay the rollout to allow for further coordination, they relented on Monday.

Both companies have [proposed](#) several measures to mitigate the possible impact of the switch to 5G, including reducing the strength of their 5G around airports and helipads, and operating 5G service at lower power levels nationwide for the first six months.

The FAA has thanked the companies for those proposals, but said the pause remained necessary to create “additional time and space to reduce flight disruptions associated with this 5G deployment”. It remains unclear what specific actions will be taken in the two-week period.

“At Secretary Buttigieg’s request, we have voluntarily agreed to one additional two-week delay of our deployment of C-Band 5G services,” an AT&T spokesperson said by email. “We also remain committed to the six-month protection zone mitigations we outlined in our letter. We know aviation safety and 5G can coexist and we are confident further collaboration and technical assessment will allay any issues.”

“While the airline industry faces many challenges, 5G is not one of them,” Hans Vestberg, chairman and CEO of Verizon, said in an email to employees today.

“In November, we agreed to pause activation until January to give the FAA more time for their analysis. We also voluntarily offered to implement a number of temporary proactive protective measures, including reducing 5G power levels near airports and directing 5G nodes away from airports ... Despite our efforts and the overwhelming scientific data, the FAA still has not resolved all of its questions.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Police warn: QR codes on parking meters</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bitdefender.com/blog/hotforsecurity/us-police-parking-meters-phishing-qr-codes/">https://www.bitdefender.com/blog/hotforsecurity/us-police-parking-meters-phishing-qr-codes/</a>
GIST	<p>In a hurry to park your car? Don't want to fumble around in your pocket to find cash for the parking meter, and don't have the correct payment app installed on your phone?</p> <p>Well, think carefully before rushing to scan the payment QR code stuck on the side of the meter - it may well be an attempt by fraudsters to phish your financial information.</p> <p>Police are <a href="#">warning</a> that they have discovered bogus QR codes stuck onto public parking meters across Austin, Texas - a city where parking meters don't display QR codes, and only accept payment via coins, cards or a smartphone app.</p> <p>So what happens if visitors to the city, or those in a rush who are not suspicious, simply scan the bogus QR code without thinking.</p> <p>The QR codes found by Austin police department directed unsuspecting users to a fraudulent website which would ask for payment details with the false promise that their parking session would be paid for.</p> <p>The City of Austin checked its parking meters after being notified of a similar QR code scam by officials in San Antonio. They had discovered over 100 parking meters similarly stickered in late December.</p> <p>Lt Marcus Booth of San Antonio Police Department told reporters that the webpage pretended to accept payment for the parking session, but that money ended up in the hands of scammers rather than in the city's coffers.</p> <p>In short, it's not just car drivers who are the victims of theft, but the city too.</p>

	<p>It's not known whether the attacks mounted against parking meters in the two cities are connected, or the work of copycats. But clearly it's not a difficult scam for other groups to replicate in other American cities, or indeed elsewhere in the world.</p> <p>As a consequence, you might be wiser paying for your parking meter with cash or via the appropriate smartphone app.</p> <p>Authorities are encouraging anyone who believes that they might have been scammed by the fraudulent parking meter QR codes to <a href="#">file a police report</a>, and inform their payment card issuer immediately.</p> <p>Meanwhile, if you see someone tampering with a parking meter, who is not a badged city employee, do the right thing and call the police.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/05 Cryptocurrency rug-pull: \$10M missing
SOURCE	<a href="https://blog.malwarebytes.com/scams/2022/01/10m-of-funds-goes-missing-in-what-appears-to-be-a-cryptocurrency-rug-pull/">https://blog.malwarebytes.com/scams/2022/01/10m-of-funds-goes-missing-in-what-appears-to-be-a-cryptocurrency-rug-pull/</a>
GIST	<p>There's a lot of concern in the cryptocurrency realm at the moment. A yield farming platform "utilizing arbitrage to gain optimal yield with low risk" has gone AWOL. <a href="#">Site down</a>, <a href="#">Twitter account deleted</a>, no word from the team behind it explaining what happened. Worst of all, some \$10 million worth of funds have been drained leading to accusations of <a href="#">rug-pulling</a>.</p> <p>So what's gone wrong with rugs in the land of yield farming?</p> <p>Yield farming in DeFi (Decentralised Finance)</p> <p><a href="#">Yield farming</a> is a popular target for scams, as lots of money is dropped into new services with the hope of big payouts via passive income earnings further down the line. People <i>do</i> receive payouts, by the way. Here's someone who <a href="#">picked up \$1,700</a> because he used one particular service prior to a specific date. However, as the article notes, many projects are open source. This makes it easy for people with bad intentions to fire up a bogus service of their own, wait for funds to be pumped into it, and then vanish.</p> <p>This is, of course, not very good when it happens. Sadly, this is what may have happened in this case.</p> <p>What is a rug pull in cryptocurrency?</p> <p>A rug pull (or "being rugged", as they call it in cryptocurrency circles) is not a fun experience. Someone creates an altcoin (any coin other than Bitcoin) on a DEX (decentralised exchange). They then spend some time hyping that token on as many platforms as possible. The more noise, the better: anything to attract potential users. As more people invest, the idea is that the token increases in value. The liquidity of the project goes up as a result.</p> <p>When hype is at its maximum and investors are running wild, the creators suddenly drain the pool of its funds and fade from existence. Anyone who bought into the project is left with worthless tokens. At this point, sites and services related to the scam token are scrubbed, and a lot of people are out of pocket. The <a href="#">rug is well and truly pulled</a>.</p> <p>What's happened to Arbix?</p> <p>A project called Arbix Finance has indeed pulled its site and deleted its Twitter. Arbix was <a href="#">audited and approved by Certik</a> in November, adding legitimacy to itself and a way to reassure users it is on the level. Here's an <a href="#">example press release</a> in relation to certification of another cryptocurrency platform. <a href="#">Audits and certifications</a> such as these are common in the DeFi space, so it's probably a <i>bit</i> disconcerting for users to see the rug pull happen despite such forms of approval.</p> <p>The <a href="#">audit history page</a> for Arbix Finance currently reads as follows:</p> <p>"Warning: This project has been confirmed to be a rugpull and is deemed high risk. Do not engage, or interact, with this project."</p>

	<p>Where did the money go?</p> <p>The Certik Twitter feed is currently revealing pieces of its investigation into what's happened. It's quite likely there's more to come, so this isn't the full story at present, but here's the current timeline of events:</p> <p>Word of the rugpull first breaks. People are told to steer clear of interacting, because it's still possible to get tangled up in losing some more money:</p> <p>Money invested by users (the missing \$10m) is sent to a variety of addresses, with a big chunk of the missing funds <a href="#">dumped</a>.</p> <p>That thread and offshoots of it are still being updated, so if you're impacted you'll want to bookmark for future reference.</p> <p>If you want to see more information about the wallets used to hold the funds and where they were sent afterwards, <a href="#">see this tweet</a>.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Montreal tourism agency confirms attack</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.itworldcanada.com/article/montreal-tourism-agency-confirms-cyber-attack/469873">https://www.itworldcanada.com/article/montreal-tourism-agency-confirms-cyber-attack/469873</a>
GIST	<p>Montreal's tourism agency has acknowledged it was hit by a cyber attack early last month, one of a number of recent Canadian and American victim organizations claimed by the Karakurt hacking group.</p> <p>"<a href="#">Tourisme Montréal</a> can confirm that it became aware of a cybersecurity incident that we experienced on December 7<sup>th</sup>, " Francis Bouchard, the agency's manager of corporate communications and public affairs, said in a statement on Tuesday.</p> <p>"We immediately retained security experts to investigate this matter further and ensure the integrity and security of our systems."</p> <p>The investigation is ongoing, he added, including identifying what data may have been affected. Employees and agency partners have been notified, he added.</p> <p>Bouchard wouldn't say how the agency was compromised, whether the stolen data had personally-identifiable information, or what the attacker was asking for.</p> <p>Tourisme Montréal (known in English as Visit Montreal) represents 900 members, partners and tourism industry stakeholders to promote the city.</p> <p>Bouchard's statement comes after a hacking group called Karakurt listed Visit Montreal in a December 29th posting as one of 11 organizations allegedly recently compromised.</p> <p>They include a Quebec construction firm, a Quebec-based bathroom designer, a Canadian First Nation, a Western Canadian data management firm, and a Western Canadian-based heavy equipment manufacturer. <i>ITWorldCanada.com</i> is attempting to verify those claims. Alleged victims in the U.S. include a credit union, a human resources firm, an asphalt manufacturer and a digital media company.</p> <p>The Karakurt posting, dubbed its Winter Data Leak Digest, says "the data amount we have obtained is speaking for itself. Which means there is a big hole in IT department that allowed us to exfiltrate everything we wanted."</p> <p><a href="#">According to Accenture</a>, Karakurt is a financially motivated threat group that was first spotted last June and started ramping up attacks late in the third quarter. It claims to have hit over 40 victims across multiple industries between September and November alone.</p>

Unlike most ransomware attacks that encrypt data, Accenture says Karakurt focuses solely on data exfiltration and extortion, threatening to release or sell stolen data unless it is paid.

However, Brett Callow, a B.C.-based threat analyst with Emsisoft, notes that what the gang actually does with stolen data isn't entirely clear. "They claim that it'll be sold but, while there is an auction page on their website, it simply 404s [a "page not found" error message] and has done so since the site was launched," he said.

While the gang varies its tactics depending on the victim, Accenture says it often uses a "living off the land" approach — meaning it takes advantage of tools and weaknesses in a victim's IT environment — and often avoids the use of common post-exploitation tools like Cobalt Strike.

If the exfiltration-only model proves successful, Callow believes more gangs will adopt it this year, because it's less risky than traditional encryption-based attacks. "They can still extort money, but likely perceive there to be less risk of attracting the attention of international law enforcement as their attacks will not disrupt the flow of oil or the provision of healthcare," he said.

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## Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	01/05 Boston bomber received Covid relief check
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/us/boston-marathon-bomber-coronavirus-relief-victims-restitution-dzhokhar-tsarnaev">https://www.foxnews.com/us/boston-marathon-bomber-coronavirus-relief-victims-restitution-dzhokhar-tsarnaev</a>
GIST	<p>Convicted <a href="#">Boston</a> Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev has been ordered by prosecutors to return a \$1,400 <a href="#">COVID</a> relief payment he received last summer along with other money sent to him, according to a court filing Wednesday.</p> <p>The money should instead be used as restitution to his victims, the filing said.</p> <p>Tsarnaev has \$3,885.06 in his inmate trust account, with the money received from the government, the Office of Federal Defenders of New York and from private citizens.</p> <p>He spent several thousand on his siblings for "gifts," "support" and "books" but has barely paid any of the more than \$101 million owed to the victims or the \$3,000 special assessment as part of his sentencing, the court filing said.</p> <p>The inmate, who was sentenced to death two years after the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, which left three people <a href="#">dead</a> and hundreds hurt, has paid only \$2,202.03 in restitution so far.</p> <p>The death sentence was overturned in 2020 after a court ruled that a trial judge erred by excluding some evidence. An <a href="#">appeal to reinstate his death sentence</a> is currently before the U.S. Supreme Court.</p> <p>He is allowed to use money for clothes and books and other items in prison, but the rest should go toward victim payments, prosecutors said.</p> <p>"By Congressional mandate, the United States has a statutory duty to collect restitution owed to crime victims," prosecutors said in the document, citing a lien placed on Tsarnaev's property, including his trust account, after his conviction.</p> <p>"The United States submits that the requested relief is reasonable and appropriate in this instance, especially in light of the Defendant prioritizing payments to his siblings over the victims of his crimes," the filing said.</p> <p>It wasn't explained how Tsarnaev received a COVID relief payment.</p>

	<p>Authorities say Tsarnaev and his brother, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, planted bombs near the marathon's finish line, resulting in deaths and injuries when the bombs exploded. The brother later died in a shootout with police during a manhunt.</p> <p>Seventeen of the injured people lost at least one limb in the attack.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Afghan Taliban turn blind eye Pakistan TTP</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/analysts-afghan-taliban-stop-pakistan-fighters-82105524">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/analysts-afghan-taliban-stop-pakistan-fighters-82105524</a>
GIST	<p>PESHAWAR, Pakistan -- Each year on Jan. 17, Shahana bakes a cake and invites friends to her home in the Pakistani city of Peshawar. They sing happy birthday for her son, even light a candle. But it's a birthday without the birthday boy.</p> <p>Her son, Asfand Khan, was 15 in December 2014 when gunmen rampaged through his military-run public school in Peshawar killing 150 people, most of them students, some as young as 5. Asfand was shot three times in the head at close range.</p> <p>The attackers were Pakistani Taliban, who seven years later have once again ramped up their attacks, seemingly emboldened by the return of Afghanistan's Taliban to power in Kabul. In the last week of December, they killed eight Pakistani army personnel in a half dozen attacks and counter attacks, all in the country's northwest. Another two Pakistani soldiers were killed in an attack on Taliban outposts late Wednesday night.</p> <p>The Pakistani Taliban, known by the acronym TTP, are regrouping and reorganizing, with their leadership headquartered in neighboring Afghanistan, according to a U.N. report from July. That is raising fears among Pakistanis like Shahana of a return of the horrific violence the group once inflicted.</p> <p>Yet the Afghan Taliban have shown no signs of expelling TTP leaders or preventing them from carrying out attacks in Pakistan, even as Pakistan leads an effort to get a reluctant world to engage with Afghanistan's new rulers and salvage the country from economic collapse.</p> <p>It is a dilemma faced by all of Afghanistan's neighbors and major powers like China, Russia and the United States as they ponder how to deal with Kabul.</p> <p>Multiple militant groups found safe haven in Afghanistan during more than four decades of war, and some of them, like the TTP, are former battlefield allies of the Afghan Taliban.</p> <p>So far, the Taliban have appeared unwilling or unable to root them out. The sole exception is the Islamic State affiliate, which is the Taliban's enemy and has waged a campaign of violence against them and for years against Afghanistan's minority Shiite Muslims, killing hundreds in dozens of horrific attacks targeting, schools, mosques, even a maternity hospital</p> <p>Washington has identified the Islamic State branch, known by the acronym IS-K, as its major militant worry emanating from Afghanistan. The Taliban's longtime ally al-Qaida is not seen as a strong threat. Though U.S. military leaders say there are signs it may be growing slightly, it is struggling near rudderless, with its current leader, Ayman al-Zawahri, alive but unwell, according to the July U.N. report.</p> <p>Still, there are plenty of other militants based in Afghanistan, and they are raising concerns among Afghanistan's neighbors.</p> <p>China fears insurgents from its Uighur ethnic minority who want an independent Xinjiang region. Russia and Central Asian nations worry about the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which in recent years went on a recruitment drive among Afghanistan's ethnic Uzbeks.</p>

For Pakistan, it is the TTP, which stands for Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan. The group perpetrated some of the worst terrorist assaults on Pakistan, including the 2014 assault on the military public school.

The TTP numbers anywhere from 4,000 to 10,000 fighters, according to the U.N. report. It has also succeeded in expanding its recruitment inside Pakistan beyond the former tribal regions along the border where it traditionally found fighters, says Amir Rana, executive director of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies, an independent think tank in the capital Islamabad.

Analysts say the Afghan Taliban's reluctance to clamp down on the TTP does not bode well for their readiness to crack down on the many other groups.

"The plain truth is that most of the terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, aside from IS-K, are Taliban allies," says Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the Washington-based Wilson Center. "And the Taliban aren't about to turn their guns on their friends, even with mounting pressure from regional players and the West."

The militants' presence complicates Pakistan's efforts to encourage international dealings with the Afghan Taliban in hopes of bringing some stability to an Afghanistan sliding into economic ruin.

Analysts say Pakistan's military has made a calculation that the losses inflicted by the TTP are preferable to undermining Afghanistan's Taliban rulers by pressing them on the issue. A collapse would bring a flood of refugees; Pakistan might be their first stop, but Islamabad warns that Europe and North America will be their preferred destination.

Islamabad attempted to negotiate with the TTP recently, but the effort fell apart. Rana of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies said Pakistan's policy of simultaneously negotiating with and attacking the TTP is "confusing" and risks emboldening like-minded insurgents in both countries.

It also worries its allies, he said.

China, which is spending billions in Pakistan, was not happy with Islamabad's attempts at talks with the TTP because of its close affiliation with Uighur separatists, said Rana. The TTP took responsibility for a July bombing in northwest Pakistan that killed Chinese engineers as well as an April bombing at a hotel where the Chinese ambassador was staying.

Pressure is mounting on Pakistan to demand the Afghan Taliban hand over the TTP leadership.

But Islamabad's relationship with the Taliban is complicated.

Pakistan's powerful military, which shepherds the country's Afghan policy, has ties to the Taliban leadership going back more than 40 years to an earlier invasion. Then, together with the U.S., they fought and defeated the invading former Soviet Union.

After the 2001 U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan was accused by Washington and its Afghan allies of aiding the Taliban. Pakistan denied the accusations, even as Taliban leaders and their families lived in Pakistan while waging their insurgency against Kabul.

But the Taliban also have interests divergent from Pakistan's, particularly the issue of the two countries' 2,500-kilometer (1,600-mile) border. Afghanistan has never recognized the border, known as the Durand Line, which was drawn by British colonial administrators in the 19th Century.

Last week, Afghan Taliban anger over Pakistan's construction of a border fence threatened to turn violent. Videos shared on social media showed Taliban destroying rolls of barbed wire meant for the fence and threatening to open fire on Pakistani troops.



	<p>The Taliban's Defense Ministry issued a statement saying Pakistan had no right to erect a border fence. On Wednesday Pakistan's military spokesman Gen. Babar Iftikar said the fence was 94% done and would be completed.</p> <p>"The fence on the Pak-Afghan border is needed to regulate security, border crossing and trade," he said. "The purpose of this is not to divide the people, but to protect them."</p> <p>Even if Pakistan were to ask the Taliban to hand over TTP leaders, it shouldn't expect any results, says Bill Roggio, editor of the Long War Journal which tracks global militancy.</p> <p>"The Afghan Taliban will not expel the TTP for the same reasons it won't expel al-Qaida," he said. "Both groups played a key role in the Afghan Taliban's victory. They fought alongside the Afghan Taliban and sacrificed greatly over the past 20 years."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/06 Local Taliban: behead store mannequins</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkpk37/taliban-behead-mannequins-video-herat">https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkpk37/taliban-behead-mannequins-video-herat</a>
GIST	<p>A disturbing video showing men in western Afghanistan decapitating mannequins dressed in women's clothes has gone viral, following an order by a local chapter of the Taliban government in the city of Herat.</p> <p>In the video, a man is seen sawing off a mannequin's head next to a pile of other heads on the floor. The voices of other men can be heard in the video, with one exclaiming "Allah hu akbar" or "God is great" right before a beheading occurs. The others can be heard laughing as the man sawing has to stop midway and remove a scarf to continue the decapitation.</p> <p>"[The Taliban] think of mannequins as statues, and they say that these mannequins are being worshipped," journalist Natiq Malikzada told VICE World News.</p> <p>The decree issued last week warned that violators would be punished. "We have ordered the shopkeepers to cut the heads off mannequins as this is against (Islamic) Sharia law," Aziz Rahman, the head of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice in the city of Herat, told <i>AFP</i>. He referred to the mannequins as "idols."</p> <p>Although a nationwide policy for the recent order has not been issued, the Taliban's version of Islamic law forbids figure-like representations. During the extremist group's first rule of Afghanistan in the 1990s, they destroyed two ancient Buddha statues that were a UNESCO World Heritage Site.</p> <p>"For shopkeepers, this has been very unfortunate. Most clothing stores in Kabul display clothes with mannequins in their shops to attract the attention of their customers. But this order by the Taliban will undoubtedly hurt their businesses and they are already very upset about this," said Malikzada.</p> <p>Store owners who reportedly criticised the decree initially hid the mannequin heads with plastic coverings and scarves. However, the ministry has deemed their measures insufficient.</p> <p>"If they just cover the head or hide the entire mannequin, the angel of Allah will not enter their shop or house and bless them," said the Taliban minister Rahman.</p> <p>According to author and human rights advocate Homeira Qaderi, the recent directive is an insidious symbolic gesture. "They used to behead humans. When I was 12, they would behead men and hang them from trees. They want to do it to spread fear among the people," Qaderi told VICE World News.</p> <p>The latest move is an example of the armed group's increasingly repressive policies that have disproportionately targeted women and girls since it seized power in August. On Dec. 26 the Taliban government <a href="#">banned</a> women from travelling long distances without being accompanied by a close male relative. The decree also forbids women without a head covering or hijab from taking public transport.</p>

For Qaderi, a single mother who fled Afghanistan for the United States after the Taliban's return to power, the mobility restrictions are particularly jarring. "I was alone and an independent woman doing everything without my relatives," said Qaderi.

"If I had still been there as a single mom, how would it have been possible for me to do regular everyday things like going shopping or buying bread, or even taking my son to school?"

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Pentagon: Iran-backed militants in attacks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/01/05/iran-attacks-us-troops-iraq-syria/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/01/05/iran-attacks-us-troops-iraq-syria/</a>
GIST	<p>A spate of attacks this week on bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria were probably conducted by Iran-backed militias, the Pentagon said Wednesday, stopping short of directly implicating Tehran.</p> <p>There is a "working level assumption" that incidents every day this week, including rocket attacks and incursions from explosives-laden drones, were coordinated by groups trained and supplied by Iran, said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby.</p> <p>"The threat is growing," he told reporters, adding that the drone attacks in particular have become more precise, though so far no Americans have been wounded this week.</p> <p>It's unclear what prompted the attacks, although commanders have been mindful, Kirby said, that Monday marked the anniversary of a U.S. strike that killed a revered Iranian general, Qasem Soleimani. A militant drone shot down in Baghdad the same day had "Soleimani's revenge" written on its wing, the Associated Press reported, and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi demanded that former president Donald Trump be "prosecuted and killed" for authorizing the attack.</p> <p>A rocket barrage launched Wednesday in Baghdad and western Iraq targeted bases housing U.S. troops but did not result in any casualties, defense officials said.</p> <p>"We don't know for sure" what is behind the escalation in attacks, Kirby said, adding that some militant groups have vowed to attack coalition troops remaining in the region after their combat mission was declared over last month. There are about 2,500 U.S. troops in Iraq and fewer than 1,000 in Syria, he said.</p> <p>Two fixed-wing drones rigged with explosives were destroyed in flight at the Ain al-Asad air base in western Iraq on Tuesday, defense officials said, describing it as a failed attack. Video from the engagement appears to show one drone engaged by an air defense system known as a C-RAM, which fires a six-barreled Gatling gun up to 75 rounds per second.</p> <p>The air base was the site of a 2020 retaliatory missile strike against U.S. forces after the operation that killed Soleimani. The strike, which led the United States and Iran to the brink of war, injured dozens of U.S. troops, including 69 who have received Purple Hearts for their wounds.</p> <p>A base used by Syrian groups opposing President Bashar al-Assad and hosting a "small number" of coalition advisory troops was targeted by eight rounds of indirect fire Wednesday, according to a news release from Operation Inherent Resolve, the U.S.-led coalition created to dismantle the Islamic State terrorist group. Coalition officials attributed the attack to "Iran-supported malign actors."</p> <p>Troops fired six artillery rounds at the attack's point of origin in response, the news release said. Those forces also fired at other launch sites hours before the attack.</p> <p>All of the recent attacks bear telltale signs of Iranian-backed militias, from tactics to munitions, according to a U.S. defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the issue's sensitivity.</p> <p>"This is not something that appears to be stopping anytime soon," the official said.</p>

	Other attacks occurred Monday as Tehran hosted a memorial for Soleimani. Iranian-backed Houthi rebels seized a ship in the Red Sea, and hackers defaced the homepage of the Jerusalem Post newspaper, replacing it with an image of a missile and a fist wearing a ring associated with Soleimani, who oversaw the Iranian military's elite Quds Force.
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## Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/06 New weapon prevent Jan 6? An algorithm
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/the-battle-to-prevent-another-jan-6-features-a-new-weapon-the-algorithm/ar-AA5urIM">https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/the-battle-to-prevent-another-jan-6-features-a-new-weapon-the-algorithm/ar-AA5urIM</a>
GIST	<p>For many Americans who witnessed the attack on the Capitol last Jan. 6, the idea of mobs of people storming a bedrock of democracy was unthinkable.</p> <p>For the data scientists who watched it unfold, the reaction was a little different: They'd been thinking about this for a long time.</p> <p>That sentiment comes from a small group working in a cutting-edge field known as unrest prediction. The group takes a promising if fraught approach that applies the complex methods of machine-learning to the mysterious roots of political violence. Centered since its inception a number of years ago on the developing world, the field's systems since last Jan. 6 are slowly being retooled with a new goal: predicting the next Jan. 6.</p> <p>"We now have the data — and opportunity — to pursue a very different path than we did before," said Clayton Besaw, who helps run CoupCast, a machine-learning program now connected to the University of Central Florida that predicts the likelihood of coups and electoral violence for dozens of countries each month.</p> <p>The efforts have acquired new urgency with the recent sounding of alarms in the United States. Last month, three retired generals <a href="#">warned</a> in a Washington Post op-ed that they saw conditions becoming increasingly susceptible to a military coup after the 2024 election. Others have worried about <a href="#">other forms of subversion and violence</a>.</p> <p>The provocative idea behind unrest prediction is that by designing an artificial-intelligence model that can quantify variables — a country's democratic history, democratic "backsliding," economic swings, <a href="#">"social-trust"</a> levels, transportation disruptions, weather volatility and others — predicting political violence can be more accurate than ever.</p> <p>Some ask whether any model can really process the myriad and often local factors that play into unrest. To those enacting it, however, the science is sufficiently strong and the data now robust enough to etch a meaningful picture. In their conception, the next Jan. 6 won't come seemingly out of nowhere as it did last winter; the models will give off warnings about the body politic as chest pains do for actual bodies.</p> <p>"Another analogy that works for me is the weather," said Philip Schrodtt, considered one of the fathers of unrest-prediction, also known as conflict-prediction. A longtime Pennsylvania State University political science professor, Schrodtt now works as a high-level consultant, including for U.S. intelligence agencies, using AI to predict violence.</p> <p>"People will see threats like we see the fronts of a storm — not as publicly, maybe, but with a lot of the same results. There's a lot of utility for this here at home."</p> <p>CoupCast is a prime example. The U.S. was always included in its model as a kind of afterthought, ranked on the very low end of the spectrum for both coups and election violence. But with new data from Jan. 6,</p>

researchers reprogrammed the model to take into account factors it had traditionally underplayed, like the role of a leader encouraging a mob, while reducing traditionally important factors like long-term democratic history.

Its prediction of electoral violence in the U.S. has gone up as a result. And while data scientists say that America's vulnerability to election violence is still way behind, say, a fragile democracy like Ukraine or a backsliding one like Turkey, it's not nearly as low as it was.

"It's pretty clear from the model we're heading into a period where we're more at risk for sustained political violence — the building blocks are there," Besaw said. [CoupCast](#) was run by a Colorado-based nonprofit called One Earth Future for five years beginning in 2016 before being turned over to UCF.

Another group, the nonprofit [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project](#), or ALCED, also monitors and predicts crises around the world, employing a mixed-method approach that relies on both machine-learning and humans working with software tools.

"There has been this sort of American exceptionalism among the people doing prediction that we don't need to pay attention to this over here, and I think that needs to change," said Roudabeh Kishi, the group's director of research and innovation. ACLED couldn't even get funding for U.S.-based predictions until 2020, when it began processing data in time for the presidential election; in October 2020 it predicted a potential attack on a federal building.

Meanwhile, [Peacetechn](#), a D.C.-based nonprofit focused on using technology in resolving conflict, will in 2022 relaunch Ground Truth, an initiative that uses AI to predict violence associated with elections and other democratic events. It had focused overseas but now will increase efforts domestically.

"For the 2024 election, God knows we absolutely need to be doing this," said Sheldon Himelfarb, chief executive of Peacetechn. "You can draw a line between data and violence in elections."

The science has grown exponentially. Past models used simpler constructs and were regarded as weak. Newer ones use such algorithmic tools as [Gradient Boosting](#), which fold in weaker models in a weighted way that makes them more useful. They also run neural networks that study decades of coups and clashes all over the world, refining risk factors as they go.

"There are so many interacting variables," said Jonathan Powell, a UCF professor overseeing CoupCast. A machine can analyze thousands of data points and do it in a local context the way a human researcher can't."

Many of the models, for instance, find income inequality not to be correlated highly with insurrection; drastic changes in the economy or climate are more indicative.

And paradoxically, social-media conflict is actually an unreliable indicator of real-world unrest. (One theory is that when actual violence is about to take place many people are either too busy or too scared to unleash screeds online.)

But not all experts are sold. Jonathan Bellish, One Earth Future's executive director, said he became disenchanted, leading him to pass off the project to UCF. "It just seemed to be a lot like trying to predict whether the Astros would win tomorrow night. You can say there's a 55 percent chance, and that's better than knowing there's a 50 percent chance. But is that enough to interpret in a meaningful policy way?"

Part of the issue, he said, is that despite the available data, much electoral violence is local. "We ran a set in one country where we found that the possibility of violence could be correlated to the number of dogs outside, because people worried would pull their dogs in off the streets," Bellish said. "That's a very useful data point. But it's hyperlocal and requires knowing humans on the ground. You can't build that into a model." Even ardent unrest-predictor advocates say that forecasting highly specific events, as opposed to general possibilities over time, is unlikely.

Bellish and other skeptics also point to a troubling consequence: Prediction tools could be used to justify crackdowns on peaceful protests, with AI used as a fig leaf. “It’s a real and scary concern,” Powell said.

Others concede the real world can be too dynamic for models. “Actors react,” said ACLED’s Kishi. “If people are shifting their tactics, a model trained on historical data will miss it.” She noted as an example the group’s tracking of a recent Proud Boys strategy of appearing at school-board meetings.

“One problem with the weather comparison is it doesn’t know it’s being forecast,” Schrodtt conceded. “That’s not true here.” A prediction that a coup wasn’t imminent could, for instance, prompt those mulling one to act as a surprise tactic.

But he said the main challenges stem from a generational and professional resistance. “An Undersecretary with a Masters from Georgetown is going to think in terms of diplomacy and human intelligence because that’s what they know,” Schrodtt said. He imagines a very slow transition to these models.

“I don’t think we’ll have this in wide use by January 6, 2025,” he added. “We should, because the technology is there. But it’s an adoption issue.”

The Pentagon, CIA and State Department have been moving on this front. The State Department in 2020 created a “Center for Analytics,” the CIA hires AI consultants and the military has embarked on several new projects. Last month, commanders in the Pacific announced they’d built a software tool that [seems to determine in advance](#) which U.S. actions might upset China. And in August, Gen. Glen VanHerck, NORAD and NORTHCOM commander, disclosed trials of the “Global Information Dominance Experiment,” in which an AI trained on past global conflict [predicts where new ones are likely to happen](#).

But the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security — two agencies central to domestic terrorism — have shown fewer signs of adopting these models.

Advocates say this would be a mistake. “It’s not perfect and it can be expensive,” said Peacetechn’s Himelfarb. “But there’s enormous unrealized potential to use data for early warning and action. I don’t think these tools are just optional anymore.”

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HEADLINE	01/05 Experts puzzled by South Carolina quakes
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/experts-puzzled-continuing-south-carolina-earthquakes-82090417">https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/experts-puzzled-continuing-south-carolina-earthquakes-82090417</a>
GIST	<p>COLUMBIA, S.C. -- Yet more earthquakes have struck near South Carolina's capital city, the ninth and tenth in a series of rumblings that have caused geologists to wonder how long the convulsions might last, or if they could possibly portend future, more serious seismic activity.</p> <p>Early Wednesday, a 2.6-magnitude earthquake struck near Elgin, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) northeast of Columbia, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. It was measured at a depth of 0.5 kilometers, officials said. About 7 hours later, another earthquake hit the area, this one with a magnitude of 1.5, according to officials.</p> <p>That area, a community of fewer than 2,000 residents near the border of Richland and Kershaw counties, has become the epicenter of a spate of recent seismic activity, starting with a 3.3-magnitude earthquake on Dec. 27. That quake clattered glass windows and doors in their frames, sounding like a heavy piece of construction equipment or concrete truck rumbling down the road.</p> <p>Since then, a total of nine more earthquakes have been recorded nearby, ranging from 1.5 to Wednesday morning's 2.6 quake. No injuries or damage have been reported.</p>

According to the South Carolina Emergency Management Division, the state typically averages up to 20 quakes each year. Clusters often happen, like six small earthquakes in just more than a week last year near Jenkinsville, about 38 miles (61 kilometers) west of the most recent group of tremors.

Earthquakes are nothing new to South Carolina, although most tend to happen closer to the coast. According to emergency management officials, about 70% of South Carolina earthquakes are located in the Middleton Place-Summerville Seismic Zone, about 12.4 miles (20 kilometers) northwest of Charleston.

In 1886, that historic coastal city was home to the largest recorded earthquake in the history of the southeastern United States, according to seismic officials. The quake, thought to have had a magnitude of at least 7, left dozens of people dead and destroyed hundreds of buildings.

That event was preceded by a series of smaller tremors over several days, although it was not known that the foreshocks were necessarily leading up to something more catastrophic until after the major quake.

Frustratingly, there's no way to know if smaller quakes are foreshadowing something more dire, according to Steven Jaume, a College of Charleston geology professor who characterized the foreshocks ahead of Charleston's 1886 disaster as "rare."

"You can't see it coming," Jaume told The Associated Press on Wednesday. "There isn't anything obvious moving or changing that you can put your finger on that you can say, 'This is leading to this.'"

Typically, Jaume said that the recent quakes near Elgin — which lies along a large fault system that extends from Georgia through the Carolinas and into Virginia — would be characterized as aftershocks of the Dec. 27 event, since the subsequent quakes have all been smaller than the first.

But the fact that the events keep popping up more than a week after the initial one, Jaume said, has caused consternation among the experts who study these events.

"They're not dying away the way we would expect them to," Jaume said. "What does that mean? I don't know."

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HEADLINE	01/05 Toxic chemicals anti-fog spray for glasses
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/05/pfas-forever-chemicals-anti-fogging-spray-wipes">https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jan/05/pfas-forever-chemicals-anti-fogging-spray-wipes</a>
GIST	<p>Anti-fogging sprays and cloths often used to prevent condensation on eyeglasses from wearing a mask or on face shields may contain high levels of potentially toxic PFAS "forever chemicals", according to a new study led by Duke University.</p> <p>Researchers tested four of the top-rated anti-fogging sprays as well as five top-rated anti-fogging cloths sold by Amazon. In all nine products, experts found fluorotelomer alcohols (FTOHs) and fluorotelomer ethoxylates (FTEOs), two types of per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS).</p> <p>PFAS have been dubbed as forever chemicals due to their longevity in the environment.</p> <p>"Our tests show the sprays contain up to 20.7 milligrams of PFAS per milliliter of solution, which is a pretty high concentration," said study lead Nicholas Herkert, a postdoctoral researcher at Duke's Nicholas School of the Environment.</p> <p>Exposure to some PFAs – perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS) in particular – have been linked to cancer, thyroid disease, fertility complications and other health problems.</p>



Herkert noted that FTOHs and FTEOs have not been studied extensively, so scientists do not know what health risks they could pose, but research currently suggests that FTOHs inhaled or absorbed through the skin could break down in the body and become toxic, long-lasting PFAs.

The FTEOs used in all four anti-fogging sprays were also analyzed in the new study and exhibited substantial cell-altering toxicity and conversion to fat cells during lab tests, said Herkert.

“It’s disturbing to think that products people have been using on a daily basis to help keep themselves safe during the Covid pandemic may be exposing them to a different risk,” said Heather Stapleton, a distinguished professor of environmental chemistry and health at Duke.

Stapleton initiated the study after reviewing the ingredients in a bottle of anti-fogging spray she bought for her 9-year-old daughter.

Stapleton noted that the other eight products did not have their ingredients listed, making it virtually impossible to tell if they contained toxic chemicals until they were analyzed using equipment from her research laboratory.

This study, conducted by Herkert and Stapleton with researchers from Duke University, Wayne State University, and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, is only the second ever to focus on FTEOS. The researchers published their peer-reviewed study on 5 January in the journal Environmental Science & Technology.

Herkert and Stapleton said that more research would be needed to expand on initial findings, with larger studies involving tests on living organisms being the next step. Studies that include a larger sample size of sprays and cloths could also help identify other unknown chemicals being used in these products.

“Because of Covid, more people than ever, including many medical professionals and other first-responders, are using these sprays and cloths to keep their glasses from fogging up when they wear masks or face shields,” said Stapleton. “They deserve to know what’s in the products they’re using.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Hawaii is rethinking tourism</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/business/hawaii-is-rethinking-tourism-heres-what-that-means-for-travelers/">https://www.seattletimes.com/business/hawaii-is-rethinking-tourism-heres-what-that-means-for-travelers/</a>
GIST	<p>John De Fries still recalls fishing the waters off Waikiki Beach in Oahu as a kid in the 1960s. “Growing up, my family fishing grounds were a source of food first and recreation second,” he says. “Today they’re a playground surrounded by hotels.”</p> <p>Born and raised in Waikiki, De Fries was appointed president of the Hawaii Tourism Authority in Sept. 2020, when coronavirus shutdowns had the state’s economy reeling but the community and environment thriving. In 2019, the state of 1.5 million people hosted a record 10.4 million visitors—unsustainable figures that had residents feeling sour. Though tourism netted \$2.07 billion in tax revenue that year, Hawaiians lamented its effects on traffic, beaches, and the cost of living.</p> <p>For locals, the quietude of 2020 “was somewhat euphoric,” says De Fries. “It felt like we got our islands back.”</p> <p>But that wasn’t sustainable either. Nor was the boom that happened in July, when visitor arrivals exceeded their 2019 level by 21% despite strict Covid-19 testing protocols, mask mandates, capacity restrictions, and staff shortages.</p> <p>That, says De Fries, “was like putting 220 volts of electricity through a 110-volt circuit.” Rental cars became so scarce that U-Hauls were found in beach parking lots; resorts jacked up rates, with average stays at hotels in Maui of \$596 a night in August; new taxes were sought; and vacation-starved visitors didn’t flinch.</p>



What comes next is a radically transformed experience for visitors — and locals — hopefully, in a good way. For the first time, Hawaii's tourism authority is majority-run by Hawaiian natives, rather than white mainlanders with hospitality degrees. With the input of locals, who range from farmers to hotel owners, each of Hawaii's four counties has created a strategic plan that stretches into 2025 and focuses on sustainable destination management rather than marketing.

The plan relies heavily on community involvement and visitor education. "In the past, visitors were spoon-fed what outsiders thought they wanted," says Kainoa Horcajo, founder of the Mo'olelo Group, a Maui-based consultancy that helps hotels to reimagine their cultural experiences. "Now, it's time to take a risk, challenge the visitor, and give them something real."

Here are the ways your experience of the state might change in the near future, and possibly forever.

### **Reservations to visit popular spots**

Want to see the black sand beach at Wai'anapanapa State Park in Maui or cross the Kauai's Kalalau Trail off your bucket list? You'll now have to make a reservation anywhere from 24 hours to 30 days in advance, depending on the site and season.

The new system, which covers roughly a dozen of Hawaii's most visited parks, is meant to curb traffic in local communities and tread more lightly on natural resources. Parking and entry fees for non-residents, which can cost from \$5 to \$15 per person, will also help to better maintain the sites.

Sean Dee, executive vice president and chief commercial officer at Outrigger Hospitality Group, which operates nearly two dozen properties across Hawaii, calls this the future of sustainable tourism. "The water is cleaner, visitors are educated, and the revenues help manage the bay," he says. "It's a win-win for everyone."

The state is trying to stoke cultural and environmental awareness among visitors. This September, Hawaiian Airlines started airing a five-minute video reminding guests to only use reef-safe sunscreen, keep distance from endangered animals such as monk seals, and be cautious of rip currents and shore breaks in the ocean.

Meanwhile Jon Benson, the general manager at the Hyatt-managed Hana-Maui Resort, has removed all towel and lounge service at nearby Hamoa Beach, home to a sacred Hawaiian burial place. He'll reinstate them only if the site can be properly honored with guidance from local kupuna, or elders, he says.

"Guests complain," Benson admits. "But when I explain why the services are on hold, they begin to understand the land around them isn't just for photos and enjoyment."

Oahu is lobbying for the establishment of a regenerative tourism fee that would apply to all arriving tourists and support environmental programs. The state seems keen on approval.

Expect this to look a bit like the \$100 fees that are charged upon port entry in the Galápagos, or embedded into airfares to the tiny Pacific island-nation of Palau. (In the latter destination, it's called a "Pristine Paradise Environmental fee.") The government is looking at both examples to model what soon may come.

### **A less colonial take on Hawaii**

In the past, tourism fed into the stories marketing executives thought white people wanted to hear, says Clifford Nae'ole, former president of the Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association. Hawaiian food was pineapple pizza and spam; a luau was just about women dancing in grass skirts. Now, chefs are proudly incorporating native Hawaiian ingredients such as ulu, or breadfruit, into dishes, and luaus have become historical lessons about the Polynesian migration to Hawaii just as much as they are entertainment.

Those luaus, for instance, won't include grass skirts — a costume that was introduced by 19th century missionaries as a more modest alternative to traditional skirts and lioncloths made of kapa, or bark cloth. "Now when kumu [hula teachers] are told costumes are too revealing, they push back and say this is the traditional dress," Nae'ole says.

You'll also see this change when you receive a lei upon arrival. Now they will be made from locally grown flowers instead of orchids, which are imported from Southeast Asia.

At the Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea, local florist Lauren Shearer, owner of Hawaii Flora + Fauna, teaches visitors how to make the garlands from foraged native fauna such as blue jade, crown flower, and ferns. "Ancestors didn't just use lei for personal adornment," says Shearer. "They were also used for peace treaties and to establish hierarchies."

Other cliches are also being rejected. The newly renovated Outrigger Reef Waikiki Beach Resort on Oahu, for instance, shines a spotlight on modern Hawaiian music, not just traditional ukulele. And at the Grand Wailea on Maui, cultural ambassador Kalei 'Uwēko'olani goes beyond offering outrigger canoe paddles and brings in storytellers such as navigator Kala Baybayan Tanaka to share tales of her father's historic, technology-free Hokulea canoe crossing from Hawaii to Tahiti.

Last November, the Hawaii Tourism Authority launched a campaign in conjunction with Hawaii Tourism USA to introduce the concept of malama, or caring for the land.

"Everyone relates to aloha," says De Fries. "Malama is emerging as its sister value."

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HEADLINE	01/05 Disturbing allegations on 'Anything Helps'
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/disturbing-allegations-emerge-about-nonprofit-hired-to-end-bitter-lake-encampment-in-seattle/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/disturbing-allegations-emerge-about-nonprofit-hired-to-end-bitter-lake-encampment-in-seattle/</a>
GIST	<p>When the volunteer-run organization Anything Helps, headed by a man who said he could do homeless encampment outreach better, approached Seattle Public Schools this summer and offered to end an encampment outside Broadview-Thompson K-12, the school district agreed.</p> <p>The district was under pressure from people in the surrounding Bitter Lake neighborhood to remove the 60-plus-person encampment, and had argued with the city of Seattle for much of the past year about whose responsibility it was and how it should be done.</p> <p>The school district didn't devote much money to the effort, and the offer from Anything Helps was appealing because of its price tag: The district thought it would only be paying the costs associated with getting people inside. The group's leader, Mike Mathias, who used to be homeless himself, and his volunteer team were all unpaid. The district ultimately reimbursed him for more than \$20,000 for those costs.</p> <p>The district did not run a background check or confirm Mathias' employment history, according to a spokesperson for Seattle Public Schools. Neither did the King County Regional Homelessness Authority, which began working with Mathias on getting housing vouchers to more than a dozen of the homeless people.</p> <p>If these agencies had, they might have reconsidered putting Mathias and Anything Helps in charge. It was a young agency, run entirely by volunteers and headed by someone who was the subject of protection orders filed by two women who alleged stalking and harassment.</p> <p>The school district also didn't run a competitive process to pick the agency it worked with, or provide much, if any, oversight to Mathias.</p>

District officials declined to answer questions about whether Mathias' background would have affected their decision to work with Anything Helps or what their responsibility was during the encampment removal.

Now, at Bitter Lake, two people who used to live in the encampment who spoke to The Seattle Times allege that at the same time Mathias was helping people move toward housing, he was pressuring them to help him buy methamphetamine, using nonprofit funds that came from the school district or community donations, and help him inject it.

Mathias has denied the allegations of misusing money and getting high, but said he did some things he regrets because of the immense pressure he was under.

The events at Bitter Lake raise questions about resources: If more public money had been devoted to the effort — by the school district or Seattle government — would a larger organization with more internal checks and balances have been hired instead?

Alison Eisinger, the director of the Seattle-King County Coalition on Homelessness, blamed former Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan, rather than the authority or the school district, for what happened.

“While this is terrible, the real questions should be — why was Seattle Public Schools left to figure this out without actual professional, contracted, experienced staff?” Eisinger said.

Spokespeople for Durkan didn't respond to questions.

The school district has ended its agreement with Anything Helps and the homelessness authority has handed off the 14 housing vouchers set aside for the nonprofit to a larger outreach organization.

#### **“An opportunity to do something different”**

The Bitter Lake encampment is [one of the more controversial of](#) the last year: Nestled on the shore of the lake between a school playground and a playfield where kids' sports resumed in 2021, some neighbors and parents pressured the city and school district to remove it. Others pushed for the city to allow the people there to stay and provide hygiene facilities so they wouldn't need to wash in the lake, potentially hazardous to everyone.

Even [after the camp removal](#), a group of neighbors and parents of Broadview-Thomson students filed a lawsuit in December against Seattle Public Schools over the camp.

But the School Board and district leadership had committed to not remove campers without a place for them to go — a mission Mathias said he shared. Mathias had watched previous cleanups and wanted to help pioneer a more compassionate way of ending encampments, he said.

“We just saw an opportunity to do something different at Bitter Lake,” Mathias said.

No other nonprofits were offering to do this work, certainly not for so little money. The school district said yes.

District officials didn't specify any oversight they provided and they didn't check into Mathias' background or experience specifically.

A spokesperson for Seattle Public Schools said the contract was with Anything Helps, not Mathias, so they simply confirmed Anything Helps was a registered nonprofit with the state. They didn't contact any other organizations.

A spokesperson for the Regional Homeless Authority said in an email that the agency did verify the organization's nonprofit status and that Anything Helps had a “relationship” with Seattle Public Schools.

But the brand-new nonprofit was essentially just Mathias, who'd created Anything Helps last spring, according to Anything Helps board director Mark Garrett. Garrett said he met Mathias in April 2021 when the two were helping homeless people displaced by encampment removals. They shared a desire to change the way encampment removals happen, so Garrett signed on as board president.

Garrett said the board members essentially worked as advisers to Mathias.

"It's a nonprofit created by Mike. It's really Mike's entity," Garrett said. "If Mike stopped working in this area, then Anything Helps would fold."

### **A past unchecked**

Mathias' employment history is difficult to verify, and court records show past allegations of intimidating women.

Seattle schools officials did not comment on whether these issues would have concerned them or whether Mathias should have been in a position of power without formal oversight.

Mathias' LinkedIn profile says he worked for the city of Issaquah for four months last year, but a city spokesperson said he worked for a local food bank under a city contract for just two. In a phone call, Mathias acknowledged he didn't work for the city directly, but said it was three months. He also lists stints at Pioneer Human Services and the National Alliance on Mental Illness' Eastside chapter, but neither could confirm or deny he worked there.

Two women who said they were in fear of him filed for protection orders against Mathias in 2017. They stem from an incident in which he broke into staff workspaces at a North Seattle substance use and mental health clinic where he was receiving treatment and yelled at employees, chased or lunged at his therapist, and threatened to beat up his psychiatrist, according to 12 statements from employees.

Staff members felt extraordinarily unsafe and "are concerned that his mental health issues, continued substance abuse, his calculating and premeditated behaviors," the clinic manager wrote, could result in "continued contact, threats, and dangerous behaviors, especially if he feels triggered." That year and the next year Mathias was also charged with malicious mischief and fourth-degree assault in Bellevue and Redmond, but he completed community service and anger management training and the charges were dismissed.

Mathias said that those were issues in his past, and that they were exaggerated — but that he'd also grown from them, and produced a letter from a therapist he met with afterward that said he was not a threat.

### **Campers' claims raise questions**

Weeks ago, an unknown number of Anything Helps volunteers sent an email outlining disturbing allegations about Mathias to a slew of homelessness policymakers.

The volunteers said that Mathias had abused his position as the person with the power to get encampment residents inside, and used illegal drugs on the clock.

When the email became public, Mathias denied most of the allegations but said he did ask a person in an encampment to help him use drugs once.

The Seattle Times spoke to many people living at the encampment on and off the record. Some defended Mathias and praised his work getting them into housing.

But Adriana Krieger, who came to Bitter Lake in July, said that Mathias invited her to his place this summer to let her shower. Before she went into the bathroom, she said, he asked her to help him find a vein so he could inject meth.

Krieger made a joke — if she screwed up, would her housing be in jeopardy? Mathias assured her no; Krieger tried several times, was unsuccessful and Mathias changed his mind, she said.

Mathias said he didn't invite Krieger back to his apartment. After a few unsuccessful attempts in his car, he said, he stopped before he got high.

Mathias said he regretted his decision and hasn't used any drugs, or asked any campers for help using them, since.

But Krieger said that she helped him successfully inject five or six times after that.

Sheri S., who asked her last name not be published because her story involves her own drug use, said she helped Mathias use four or five times this fall as well, and that she saw him use the nonprofit's company card to get cash he then gave her so she could buy meth for the two of them.

"He said he was helping me out," Sheri said. "I'll help you get yours today if you can help me shoot up."

Mathias denied these allegations as well.

Public records obtained by The Seattle Times showed that instead of including receipts, invoices from Anything Helps simply listed services the group said it provided, such as "moving expenses and cleaning fees," and amounts. The school district has asked for all receipts related to the work and Mathias is providing them, he said.

#### **"I feel like I'm a martyr"**

Mathias believes this is a coordinated defamation campaign resulting from a falling-out with a former Anything Helps volunteer. He says since the email outlining accusations was sent and covered in local media, he's been harassed at home, at encampment removals where he's tried to help and even physically attacked — Mathias shared pictures of his face with stitches.

"I feel like I'm a martyr in all this," Mathias said.

He pointed out that he is formerly homeless and received financial assistance from the state while he was doing outreach.

People with experience being homeless and navigating the behavioral health system make the best outreach staff, according to Derrick Belgarde, executive director of the Chief Seattle Club, which works with Indigenous people who are homeless.

"They're more accepted into the community or into the encampment," Belgarde said. But those people need to be vetted and supported when they're going back to situations like the ones they've been in, in the past.

If an outreach worker or case manager started using drugs and it was affecting the person's work, Belgarde said, Chief Seattle Club would work with that person to perhaps take leave and get into treatment. But if they were caught even trying to do drugs with people they're supposed to be helping, it's a "fired-on-the-spot offense."

"We've got to make sure they're ready, because the last thing we want to do is retraumatize people, or put them into a situation where they're triggered," Belgarde said.

The email with allegations — which wasn't signed by individuals, just "The Anything Helps team" — caused the homelessness authority to temporarily suspend housing vouchers Mathias had been working to get for people at Bitter Lake.

	<p>But no one appears to take responsibility for investigating whether wrongdoing happened. The homelessness authority said an investigation was under the school district's purview, and the school district said it is up to Anything Helps. But because Anything Helps leadership is basically just Mathias, the nonprofit won't be investigating.</p> <p>Mathias stepped down from Anything Helps after the allegations emerged so the housing vouchers from the Regional Homelessness Authority wouldn't be endangered, he said. Board member Garrett is now the acting director.</p> <p>"To set me up to the degree of which there would be this expectation that I would be this put-together, formal leader in this space is not what I was ever trying to do," Mathias said. "I was just trying to build a parallel structure. I was trying to do something different."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Criticism of Kent PD in controversy 'hidden'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/criticism-of-kent-police-nazi-controversy-was-hidden-on-social-media-by-police-chiefs-wife-who-ran-the-accounts/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/criticism-of-kent-police-nazi-controversy-was-hidden-on-social-media-by-police-chiefs-wife-who-ran-the-accounts/</a>
GIST	<p>Official city of Kent social media accounts overseen by the wife of the city's police chief hid public posts critical of the department's handling of an investigation into an assistant police chief who posted Nazi insignia on his office door, embraced the rank of one of the Third Reich's top officials and joked about the Holocaust.</p> <p>Kent City Attorney Arthur Fitzpatrick acknowledged that in recent days, several tweets posted in response to official statements about an investigation into Assistant Police Chief Derek Kammerzell had been hidden by the site administrator.</p> <p>"The issue is being rectified as we speak," he said Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>Shortly thereafter, several comments sharply critical of the city's response to revelations about Kammerzell's behavior appeared on the accounts, @cityofkent and @kentpd, most dated Tuesday, the same day <a href="#">The Seattle Times published a story about the Kammerzell investigation</a>.</p> <p>Fitzpatrick confirmed the accounts are overseen by Tracey Padilla, a former Kent police commander and wife of Police Chief Rafael Padilla. Tracey Padilla is now a communications specialist in the office of Mayor Dana Ralph.</p> <p>A citizen watchdog group, No Secret Police, said Wednesday it complained to Fitzpatrick that the group's comments on the city's Twitter accounts questioning the discipline Chief Padilla handed out to Kammerzell had been hidden. The comments — responses to a tweet posted by the city about the thoroughness of the investigation — included contact information for the mayor, the City Council, the police chief and other city officials and urged residents to contact them.</p> <p>Twitter allows the author of a tweet to hide comments they deem inappropriate. The Kent accounts both state that they are public forums, but that content that is profane "or promote or are intended to facilitate harm (such as doxing)" will be removed.</p> <p>Fitzpatrick, in an emailed response to a No Secret Police account on Wednesday — a copy of which the group provided to The Times — stated, "Thank you for your patience as we looked into this matter. The City will be un hiding the hidden replies. This is being done in the interest of transparency and robust discussion."</p> <p>Telephone messages seeking comment from Mayor Ralph and Tracey Padilla were not returned Wednesday evening.</p>

Kammerzell, a 27-year veteran of the Kent Police Department, was commander over the special investigations and detective bureau in 2019 when he posted Nazi rank insignia over the nameplate on his office door. He also embraced the title of “obergruppenfuhrer,” one of the highest-ranking officials in Adolf Hitler’s dreaded paramilitary Schutzstaffel, or SS, which was responsible for the murders of millions of Jews and other groups.

Kammerzell reportedly once shaved his facial hair into a Hitler-like mustache and was photographed with city officials, including Mayor Ralph, at a 2019 city Oktoberfest celebration dressed in lederhosen and giving what looked to be a stiff-armed Nazi salute. Kammerzell said he may have been waving to the crowd.

He reportedly also joked that his grandfather died in the Holocaust — by falling drunk out of a Nazi camp guard tower.

The behavior sparked outrage from the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle, which [issued a statement condemning Kammerzell's actions](#) and the city’s failure to deal harshly with them.

Kammerzell told an attorney from a Seattle law firm brought in to investigate the matter that he had gleaned the title from the streaming series “The Man in the High Castle,” adapted from Philip K. Dick’s 1962 dystopian novel in which Nazi Germany won World War II and occupied America. The antagonist, Obergruppenfuhrer John Smith, is an American military defector who climbed the ranks of the Nazi Party in the U.S. to lead its continued efforts to round up and exterminate Jews.

Kammerzell said he didn’t understand the significance of the insignia. The investigation concluded that Kammerzell’s explanation was not credible.

Chief Padilla determined Kammerzell had created a hostile work environment and exhibited conduct unbecoming a Kent police officer, but concluded Kammerzell had not violated the department’s “truthfulness” policy, which could have led to termination.

Padilla gave Kammerzell two weeks off without pay, with the option of taking that time as paid vacation.

The group No Secret Police obtained copies of the investigation and the discipline decision through the state’s Public Records Act, and the ensuing media coverage “rocked our community,” Mayor Ralph said at a Tuesday City Council meeting. Earlier in the day, the mayor met with representatives from the Jewish Federation and its government and community relations council.

She opened the meeting with a statement saying she had consulted with Chief Padilla and instructed City Attorney Fitzpatrick to contact the police officers union and seek Kammerzell’s resignation.

“While we are confident the city followed best practices by promptly investigating the conduct of Derek Kammerzell and imposing discipline, it [is] clear that the process did not produce a result that is acceptable to our community or, quite honestly, me,” the mayor said.

Fitzpatrick on Wednesday said no reportable progress had been made on that front.

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HEADLINE	01/06 NKorea claims hypersonic missile test
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/5/north-korea-says-it-successfully-launched-hyperson/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jan/5/north-korea-says-it-successfully-launched-hyperson/</a>
GIST	SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Thursday it has successfully launched a hypersonic missile as part of efforts to modernize its strategic weapons systems, days after leader Kim Jong Un vowed to bolster his military forces despite pandemic-related difficulties.



Wednesday's launch, the North's first known weapons test in about two months, indicates that the country will press ahead with plans to build powerful, sophisticated missiles rather than returning to disarmament talks anytime soon.

The official Korean Central News Agency said the Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party expressed "great satisfaction" at the results of the missile test, which was observed by leading weapons officials.

It's the second known test-flight of a hypersonic missile since North Korea first tested such a weapon last September. It wasn't immediately known if both are the exactly same type of hypersonic missile.

"The successive successes in the test launches in the hypersonic missile sector have strategic significance in that they hasten a task for modernizing strategic armed force of the state," a KCNA dispatch said. The word "strategic" implies the missile is being developed to deliver nuclear weapons.

Hypersonic weapons, which fly at speeds in excess of Mach 5, or five times the speed of sound, could pose crucial challenges to missile defense systems because of their speed and maneuverability. It's unclear whether and how soon North Korea could manufacture such a high-tech missile, but it was among a wish-list of sophisticated military assets that Kim disclosed early last year, along with a multi-warhead missile, spy satellites, solid-fueled long-range missiles and underwater-launched nuclear missiles.

The North's latest launch was first detected by its neighbors.

The U.S. military called it a ballistic missile launch that "highlights the destabilizing impact of (North Korea's) illicit weapons program." South Korea and Japan expressed concerns or regrets over the launch. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reiterated that North Korea should resume talks with other countries.

U.S.-led diplomacy on North Korea's nuclear program remains stalled since 2019 due to disputes over international sanctions on the North. The Biden administration has repeatedly called for resuming the nuclear diplomacy "anywhere and at any time" without preconditions, but North Korea has argued the U.S. must first withdraw its hostility against it before any talks can restart.

During last week's plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party, Kim repeated his vow to expand his country's military capabilities without publicly presenting any new positions on Washington and Seoul.

The North's advancing nuclear arsenal is the core of Kim's rule, and he's called it "a powerful treasured sword" that thwarts potential U.S. aggressions. During his 10-year rule, he's conducted an unusually large number of weapons tests to acquire an ability to launch nuclear strikes on the American mainland. But his country's economy has been faltering severely in the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the sanctions and his government's own mismanagement.

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## Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	01/06 Year since violent Capitol riot
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/biden-congress-mark-a-year-since-violent-insurrection/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/biden-congress-mark-a-year-since-violent-insurrection/</a>
GIST	WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is preparing to mark the first anniversary of the U.S. Capitol insurrection, the violent attack by Trump supporters that has fundamentally changed the Congress and raised global concerns about the future of American democracy.

Biden and congressional Democrats will start Thursday in Statuary Hall, one of several spots where rioters swarmed a year ago and interrupted the electoral count. Biden is set to draw a contrast between the truth of what happened and the false narratives that have sprung up about the Capitol assault, including the continued refusal by many Republicans to affirm that Biden won the 2020 election. He plans to highlight the ongoing threat facing the nation's democracy by those who used or condoned the use of force to try to subvert the will of the people.

"And so at this moment we must decide what kind of nation we are going to be," Biden will say, according to excerpts of his remarks released early Thursday. "Are we going to be a nation that accepts political violence as a norm? Are we going to be a nation where we allow partisan election officials to overturn the legally expressed will of the people? Are we going to be a nation that lives not by the light of the truth but in the shadow of lies? We cannot allow ourselves to be that kind of nation. The way forward is to recognize the truth and to live by it."

Biden planned to outline "the singular responsibility" then-President Donald Trump bears for the violence of that day, when he egged on his protesters and waited hours before calling for calm. He also planned to warn that Jan. 6 is part of an enduring challenge to the nation's system of government.

"It's of immediate consequence to the country because we're in an ongoing challenge to the democracy," said White House senior adviser Mike Donilon. "It's also important so that when people look back on this moment they see the truth, and they don't see some reimagined or revisionist history of what actually took place."

A series of remembrance events during the day will be widely attended by Democrats, in person and virtually, but almost every Republican on Capitol Hill will be absent. The division is a stark reminder of the rupture between the two parties, worsening since hundreds of Trump's supporters violently pushed past police, used their fists and flagpoles to break through the windows of the Capitol and interrupted the certification of Biden's victory.

While congressional Republicans almost universally condemned the attack in the days afterward, most have stayed loyal to the former president.

Rep. Liz Cheney, chair of the House committee investigating the attack and one of the few GOP lawmakers attending the Capitol ceremonies, warned that "the threat continues." Trump, she said, "continues to make the same claims that he knows caused violence on January 6."

"Unfortunately, too many in my own party are embracing the former president, are looking the other way or minimizing the danger," she told NBC's "Today." "That's how democracies die. We simply cannot let that happen."

In a bid to inform the public, Democrats investigating the insurrection plan to spend the coming months telling the American people exactly what happened last Jan. 6. But leaders will spend the anniversary appealing to broader patriotic instincts.

During the 2020 campaign, Biden said his impetus for running for the White House was to fight for the "soul of the nation" after watching Trump's comments that some good people were among the white supremacists who marched in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. He warned that American democracy was at stake, and his view is that the Jan. 6 attack was a vivid demonstration of his fears.

On Thursday, aides said, Biden will harken back to his call during his inaugural address, just two weeks after the insurrection, for leaders to speak the truth about the attack and what motivated it — even as some GOP lawmakers and the the public deny the events of that day.

"There is truth and there are lies," Biden said at the time. "Lies told for power and for profit. And each of us has a duty and responsibility, as citizens, as Americans, and especially as leaders — leaders who have pledged to honor our Constitution and protect our nation — to defend the truth and to defeat the lies."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, too, is marking the anniversary with a high-minded appeal, telling The Associated Press in an interview Wednesday that “democracy won that night,” when Congress returned to the Capitol after the riot and affirmed Biden’s victory.

To honor the anniversary, Pelosi has scheduled a moment of silence in the House, where many members were evacuated and some were trapped as the rioters tried to break in; a moderated discussion with historians Doris Kearns Goodwin and Jon Meacham; and a session featuring testimonials from members who were there that day. While many lawmakers will be absent due to concerns about COVID-19, several of the events will be livestreamed so they can participate.

Biden’s sharp message and the Republicans’ distance from it come as lawmakers are adjusting to the new normal on Capitol Hill — the growing tensions that many worry will result in more violence or, someday, a legitimate election being overturned. Democrats and a handful of Republicans feel a desperate urgency to connect to a public in which some have come to believe Trump’s lies that the election was stolen from him and that the attack wasn’t violent at all.

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research showed that 3 in 10 Republicans say the attack was not violent, and about another 3 in 10 say it was somewhat violent. Around two-thirds of Americans described the day as very or extremely violent, including about 9 in 10 Democrats.

As Biden is prepared to direct blame toward the former president, the percentage of Americans who blame Trump for the Jan. 6 riot has grown slightly over the past year, with 57% saying he bears significant responsibility for what took place.

In an AP-NORC poll taken in the days after the attack, 50% said that.

Trump’s claims of widespread election fraud were rejected by the courts and refuted by his own Justice Department.

An investigation by the AP found fewer than 475 cases of voter fraud among 25.5 million ballots cast in the six battleground states disputed by Trump, a minuscule number in percentage terms.

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HEADLINE	01/05 New Seattle city attorney: law and order
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattles-new-city-attorney-vows-to-make-sure-that-our-laws-are-meaningful/281-06a3029f-eebe-4cbd-8c5b-fab67da16433">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattles-new-city-attorney-vows-to-make-sure-that-our-laws-are-meaningful/281-06a3029f-eebe-4cbd-8c5b-fab67da16433</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — It is one thing to talk the talk of a campaign, and another to walk the walk as an elected official.</p> <p>On Wednesday, new Seattle City Attorney Ann Davison got an earful in a face-to-face visit with residents of the Chinatown International District.</p> <p>Davison has officially been in office for just five days. She is the <a href="#">first woman to ever hold the office</a>. She has vowed to "<a href="#">make sure that our laws are meaningful</a>."</p> <p>Nora Chan is banking on it. The longtime resident of the International District told Davison that her neighbors, friends, and business owners are sick of the graffiti, garbage, and crime that has littered her home.</p> <p>"If I come to eat here, I've lost my appetite," said Chan as she showed Davison an alley where the trash has piled up. Next door, a business owner has replaced his windows. "He's really scared, so he put the wood blocks in the windows."</p>

	<p>Chan, who was flanked by other community elders, believes public safety leaders have neglected the diverse, culturally rich neighborhood.</p> <p>"We need to make sure we're providing the public safety piece," acknowledged Davison while sipping tea at the Tai Tung Chop Suey restaurant on King Street.</p> <p>She's already turned over top leadership in her department, calling it "new energy," but also saying it will take time to chart a new course.</p> <p>She fully admits that up in the street, in Little Saigon, an open-air drug market is a problem and should be a focus of a "public safety partnership." But Davison also said her department is dealing with a 4,000-case backlog.</p> <p>"My top priorities right now is going to be how do we focus on that now, cause right now, it would be insurmountable to look at that because cases are going to the back of the line with my predecessor," she said.</p> <p>Davison said she'll outline a couple additional policy statements in the coming weeks.</p> <p>Chan said, after the walk about, she's ready for some steps in a different direction and believes her community needs it because right now, "that's not being fair, because these people can't complain."</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/05 Arrest: teen threatened school shooting</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/14-year-old-arrested-for-threatening-to-shoot-teen-students-at-meadowdale-high-school">https://komonews.com/news/local/14-year-old-arrested-for-threatening-to-shoot-teen-students-at-meadowdale-high-school</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>LYNNWOOD, Wash. — A 14-year-old is facing charges after using a video messaging app to threaten to shoot another teen at Meadowdale High School.</p> <p>The Lynnwood Police Department said the 14-year-old student at Edmonds-Woodway High School threatened to shoot the other teen and other classmates. In the video police said the teen showed what was described as a handgun. The teen threatened told Meadowdale High School administrators and notified police.</p> <p>Police arrested the suspect hours later at his parent's house. Detectives believe the gun in the video was an airsoft gun.</p> <p>The teen will be booked into the Denney Juvenile Justice Center on charges of harassment with threats to kill.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/05 KCSO: cannabis store worker shot</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/cannabis-store-employee-shot-multiple-times-suspects-on-the-run">https://komonews.com/news/local/cannabis-store-employee-shot-multiple-times-suspects-on-the-run</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>SHORELINE, Wash. — A cannabis store employee is battling life-threatening injuries after he was shot Wednesday night by multiple suspects.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the King County Sheriff's Office said an employee at Dockside Cannabis at 15029 Aurora Avenue North was shot. Police said he was taken to the hospital with life-threatening injuries.</p> <p>Investigators are searching for multiple suspects in the shooting.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/05 Proud Boys changed tactics after Jan. 6</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/z3n338/what-the-proud-boys-did-after-jan-6">https://www.vice.com/en/article/z3n338/what-the-proud-boys-did-after-jan-6</a>

Buhl, Idaho, is a city of just 4,000 people, best known for the abundance of rainbow trout in its hatcheries and as the birthplace of a famous cigar-smoking televangelist.

Yet despite its small size, the Proud Boys, a neo-fascist street-fighting gang, thought that this “sleepy red town,” and in particular, its annual Fourth of July Sagebrush Days Parade would be a good opportunity to promote their brand.

The theme of the 2021 parade was “Celebrate the Good Old Days.” Kids stayed cool with sno-cones on the side of the road, trucks advertising local businesses rolled by, and the current title holder of Miss Magic Valley Stampede waved to onlookers from atop her heavily accessorized horse.

Then came the Proud Boys parade float, decked out with yellow and black balloons and flanked by uniformed members with their faces completely covered by gaiters emblazoned with their logo.

“I heard one mom tell her kiddos it was just a ‘drunk uncle drinking club,’” remarked one reader in response to an article in the local [Times-News](#) about the Proud Boys’ involvement.

But to others in attendance, just six months after the Jan. 6 insurrection and the arrests of many of their members who stormed the Capitol that day, the Proud Boys were patriots who had every right to participate in Buhl’s annual event.

“I did not see these guys doing anything but supporting our country with flags and marching in a parade,” commented another reader of the *Times-News*. “I don’t belong to the group, but I have read what they are about and it seems like they support our country and liberty.”

### **Proud Boys Go Local**

After the deadly Capitol riot, the Proud Boys appeared to retreat from the national stage amid intense scrutiny, a flurry of serious federal charges (nearly 50 members have been charged so far), and rumored infighting. Then came the bombshell report that their “chairman,” Enrique Tarrio, was at one time a “[prolific](#)” [police informant](#). All this prompted speculation from some media outlets that the group was on the brink of collapse.

But around the spring of 2021, [VICE News noticed a trend](#) that hinted at a different and potentially quite troubling story about the Proud Boys’ reach, resilience, and ground-level support. It seemed that they were flying under the national radar, and eschewing large-scale, high-profile appearances in favor of quietly solidifying alliances around hot-button political issues and community activism.

We spent the last year closely tracking and documenting this trend, and found that Proud Boys made at least 114 uniformed appearances across 73 cities in 24 states between Jan. 6 and Dec. 21, 2021.

“Over the past year, the Proud Boys have worked to embed themselves amongst local activists who haven’t been tarnished by the Jan. 6 insurrection,” said Devin Burghart, executive director of the Missouri-based Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights (IREHR). “They’ve enmeshed themselves into local efforts to push back against vaccine mandates, or critical race theory, and other local conflicts, which has allowed them to steer clear of the national discussion about the insurrection and provide them with a base of support that they didn’t have prior to Jan. 6.”

For example, they organized an Easter egg hunt in a Chicago suburb, serenaded a crowd of anti-vaxxers outside California’s Capitol in Sacramento with a nationalist ballad, and posed a menacing presence at school board meetings where “critical race theory” was being discussed. They’ve put together Christmas toy drives for terminally ill children in places like Seattle, Long Island, and Miami. They’ve provided security for the “Church at Planned Parenthood,” led by an evangelical anti-abortion pastor, in Salem, Oregon.

“We have the Proud Boys across the street,” said Pastor Ken Peters in [a livestream](#) from the Salem event in July, turning the camera to a group of men in the group’s uniform. “Oh my goodness, thank God for the Proud Boys.”

“They’re out to make the case for the Proud Boys, show that they’re not bad people, that they’re here to help the community,” said Daryle Lamont Jenkins, an antifascist researcher who has tracked the far-right for decades and runs [One People’s Project](#), which monitors hate groups. “They’re on some sort of publicity tour. It’s pretty much them trying to sell themselves to the American people.”

Their PR drive might be paying off. VICE News found scant evidence that Proud Boys encountered any pushback from fellow right-wingers when they showed up to their 2021 events in uniform. Burghart sees the lack of pushback as consistent with a recent survey by the Public Religion Research Institute that found that [68% of Republicans](#) believe the baseless conspiracy theory that the 2020 U.S. presidential election was stolen from Donald Trump.

“In many camps, the Proud Boys are viewed as the militant wing defending that position,” said Burghart. “That they, along with the Oath Keepers and other groups, were willing to step forward and fight.” The same survey found that 30% of Republicans (and one in five Americans) agreed that “true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country.”

### **Strategy**

VICE News’ dataset offers key insight into ground-level Proud Boy activity in 2021—and a better understanding of their goals headed into a crucial midterm-election year. Burghart says the Proud Boys are a bellwether for the direction and focus of the far-right more broadly.

“The important thing to remember about the Proud Boys is that they’ve always been remarkably opportunistic,” said Burghart. “If you want to know where the momentum is on the far-right, watch where the Proud Boys are going.”

The Proud Boys’ shift toward local politics and coalition-building has been encouraged by Proud Boy leadership, with the apparent goal of whitewashing their reputation, avoiding the national media spotlight, and bolstering their political cachet.

Prior to Jan. 6, when Proud Boys gathered in public, they were largely a chaotic, beer-swilling mass of yellow and gold itching for a fight.

And even though violence has pretty much been an inevitability of Proud Boy appearances for years, their leaders have insisted that their public appearances are almost always carefully strategized. “When we set out to do an event, we go, OK, what is our main objective?” Proud Boy organizer Joe Biggs, who is currently facing conspiracy charges for his alleged actions at the Capitol, said on a podcast in December 2020. “That’s the first thing we discuss. We take three months to plan an event.”

According to internal chats obtained by federal prosecutors, Proud Boys were under an organization-wide “stand down” order for three months in the immediate aftermath of the events at the Capitol. Not all chapters complied with the top-down directive, but our dataset does show that there was a relative lull in Proud Boy activity between January and March 2021—just nine uniformed appearances in total during those three months, in four different states—compared to the rest of the year.

After that three-month hiatus, scattered Proud Boy activity began popping up around popular right-wing issues like gun rights and mask mandates—as well as more nebulous causes, like “freedom.”

Proud Boy leader Tarrio, who is currently serving a 155-day jail sentence for vandalizing property belonging to a historically Black church in D.C., [told VICE News](#) in September that he hoped “the guys would focus on local elections, local candidates, and things like that.” Tarrio, who has made several failed political bids, also discussed this strategy in one of his podcast episodes over the summer. “We’ve been doing things on a national level for quite some time,” said Tarrio, a Miami native. “A lot of my guys are



now focusing on their local communities. A lot of stuff with the school boards. A lot of my guys, not even just here in Florida but across the country.”

Their decision to “go local” is in keeping with the [broader trajectory of the GOP and far-right](#). The intense anger around the conspiracy-driven “Stop the Steal” movement, which culminated with thousands of Trump supporters storming the U.S. Capitol, has since bled into suburbs and towns nationwide. Typically less-than-exciting settings like school board and city council meetings have turned into ground zero for culture war issues like vaccines, mask mandates, and the supposed teaching of critical race theory, the catchall term for any socially progressive education.

And like a culture-war edition of *Where’s Waldo*, in the sea of disgruntled locals, QAnon moms, and rabid anti-vaxxers crowding into meeting rooms, you can often find the Proud Boys, in their gold-and-black uniforms. Here’s some of the main takeaways from our dataset and what it says about the future of the group.

### **Geography**

We found that Proud Boys last year were most active in Florida, California, and Oregon, and there was an uptick in uniformed activity in New York in the last few months of 2021.

There were quite a few instances where Proud Boy activity spiked in a particular city but was short-lived as the momentum around their chosen issue faded away.

In Modesto, California, Proud Boys showed up to city hall meetings in uniform on three separate occasions over a six-week period last summer to protest against police reforms and the city’s decision to charge a white cop who fatally shot an unarmed Black man.

“The left has created this atmosphere to promote hatred for police,” Proud Boy Sean Adam K [said at one of those meetings—and accused the newly established police oversight committee of being “antifa,” to applause from others in the room.](#)

Similarly, when protests against the Cuban government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic materialized on the streets of Miami last summer, Proud Boys saw an opportunity. Not only did they have some legitimate claim to the movement via their leader, Florida resident and Cuban-American Tarrio, but the core issues of the movement (a Communist government and harsh lockdown restrictions) fit neatly into the far-right’s efforts to paint public health orders as fundamentally anti-American. In less than one week in July, Proud Boys made four uniformed appearances. On at least one of those nights, they showed up with a huge flag that encompassed the Proud Boy logo, with the words, “TRUMP WON; TAKE AMERICA BACK.”

There were some perplexing geographical gaps in our dataset, especially in the Deep South, excluding Florida. Though Proud Boys have typically been more coastally focused (and active in areas where simmering urban-versus-rural tensions create ripe conditions for political violence), they do claim to have a presence in most states. A VICE News analysis of Proud Boy telegram channels found that the group claims to have at least 157 active chapters in the U.S., in all states apart from Delaware, Vermont, Wyoming, plus Washington, D.C. (It’s hard to say for sure how many official Proud Boys there are in the U.S.; Tarrio has claimed there are tens of thousands of members around the world. Membership estimates by extremist group leaders should always be taken with a grain of salt. However, their national reach and ability to turn out significant numbers to large-scale events would suggest that there are at least thousands of members in the U.S.)

Some of the gaps in our data could be explained by the criteria we applied to this project. Each entry had to have corresponding photo or video evidence, meaning we relied heavily on the work of local news outlets (which have been [systematically gutted](#) in recent years), concerned residents, and antifascist researchers.



For example, the majority of our Florida entries were sourced to Twitter posts from a group of activists working under the umbrella of Miami Against Fascism. They regularly post detailed threads mapping out connections between various far-right actors in Florida and documenting their presence at events in the Miami area.

### **Violence**

Our other criterion was that at least one Proud Boy had to be wearing the group's uniform (which they refer to as "colors") or insignia. This rule also resulted in a skewed perception of Proud Boy activity in 2021, especially when it comes to violent acts committed by members of the group.

Different chapters have different rules about wearing colors, but often the decision to don the uniform at a particular event is made by local or national leadership, depending on its scale. Ahead of Jan. 6, Tarrio instructed members of the group to forgo colors, with the goal of blending in with the crowd in D.C.

Similarly, Proud Boys from northern Illinois used Telegram [to plan their presence at an "Italian Unity Day"](#) rally in Chicago last August to demand the reinstatement of a Christopher Columbus statue. "Hope to see you out there, Proud of your Boy—we Need Soldiers," wrote one Proud Boy on the channel. "No Colors."

"When they're in the field getting into something and they don't want Proud Boys pegged, they don't wear colors," said antifascist researcher Jenkins. "If they don't want to incriminate the club, as they put it, they're not gonna wear their colors."

Los Angeles and its surrounding suburbs emerged as a hotspot for this type of political violence in the last year. Repeated clashes over a handful of culture war issues resulted in [stabblings](#) and beatings in broad daylight.

Researchers have identified some of the repeated perpetrators in those clashes as known Proud Boys. However, those individuals have tended to show up in LA with their faces entirely covered, without any Proud Boy insignia.

Still, at least a fifth of the events in our dataset did involve violence, particularly in the Pacific Northwest.

One particularly chaotic showdown, between Proud Boys and antifascists in Oregon City in June, was described by reporters who were there as "open warfare" and "medieval clashes."

An even bloodier confrontation took place in Portland two months later, where hundreds of Proud Boys and their allies descended on the famously liberal city and battled local leftists for hours. Many who were involved in those clashes traveled over state lines to Olympia, Washington, a few weeks later, which resulted in assaults, and ultimately, [an antifascist opening fire](#) on a well-known Proud Boy.

### **"Good Neighbors"**

Many of the Proud Boys' in-uniform activities fell under old-fashioned PR exercises. In addition to the [Easter egg hunt](#) in a Chicago suburb (which descended into violence when they encountered counterprotesters), a chapter of Proud Boys in Montana were asked to withdraw [as sponsors of a veterans poker night](#) once word got out about their planned involvement. Similarly, a Proud Boy chapter in South Dakota, [citing unspecified "safety concerns,"](#) withdrew as the sponsors of a 12-hour music festival in a small town called Scotland.

Last month in Long Island, New York, a group of Proud Boys in a yellow pickup truck delivered Christmas presents to a children's hospital. A man dressed as Santa Claus rode atop the truck—with a Proud Boy logo sewn onto his red hat.

Proud Boys also [participated in a toy drive](#) in Miami last month to benefit the Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital, and threw up the white-power "OK" sign while posing for a photo with a woman in a red hat saying "We the People" and a man in a Santa suit.

### **Public Comment Sessions Run Wild**

About a quarter of the uniformed Proud Boy appearances in 2021 that we logged were at school board meetings or city council meetings.

In mid-December, a group of Proud Boys with their faces covered showed up to a city council meeting in Woodbridge, a township in New Jersey often considered a bedroom suburb of New York City. Woodbridge leans Democratic but also has a large population (41%) who voted for Trump.

“It’s not a racist town, really, but you do have some smatterings of people who wish it was —and they have a loud voice,” said Jenkins, who’s based in Philadelphia and is especially familiar with far-right groups active in Pennsylvania and neighboring New Jersey.

During the meeting’s public comment session, Proud Boys verbally sparred with local activists who identified themselves as being affiliated with Black Lives Matter.

Some locals chastised the board and mayor for allowing the Proud Boys to be there in the first place. One woman spoke directly to the Proud Boys, calling them “disgusting.”

One man who had come to the meeting with a yellow folder full of paperwork to discuss a zoning and redevelopment issue in the township also felt compelled to weigh in on the evening’s drama—striking a surprisingly sympathetic chord with the uniformed Proud Boy guests in their presence.

“By the way, I just wanna say something in response to all this commotion tonight,” he said. “People talk about the far-right and all that, you know, Black Lives Matter? Yeah, all lives matter, not just yours. You got your opinion, this is America, you don’t have the right to everybody’s opinion.”

A Proud Boy who gave his name as “Burt” said he was there to say “we will not have our children fed sexual degeneracy or rewriting of history.”

School board meetings in Washougal, Washington, located about 20 minutes outside of Portland, have also become the backdrop to tense confrontations between uniformed Proud Boys, their allies, and parents who have kids attending the schools. Wendi Moose, a concerned parent who teaches in another district, shared photos and videos of uniformed Proud Boys at at least two meetings over the fall.

In one of those meetings, a uniformed Proud Boy addressed the other men in the room. “I’m a father, a husband, a combat veteran—and I’m also part of the greatest brotherhood in the world,” he said. “All you men have been put on notice that you are cowards. You have the power to stand up and end the CRT [Critical Race Theory], end the sex ed, get rid of the masks, quit all this bullshit.”

### **All the allies**

We also tried to keep track of the groups or individuals who showed up at the same events, and found that their peers ran the gamut from brazen white nationalists to militia types to antivax moms to aspiring politicians or even local officials. For example, Proud Boys provided security at an event in Salem, Oregon, that featured speeches by a local gun and tactical gear store, as well as the “Stolen Voices Foundation,” which advocates against abortion. [Uniformed Proud Boys rallied](#) in support of a school nurse in New Jersey whose employment wasn’t renewed after she refused to enforce a mask requirement. Wellness influencer and anti-vaxxer Stephanie Locricchio was among the speakers at that rally.

Proud Boys also joined a protest outside a hospital in Meridian, Idaho, alongside [members of Peoples Rights](#), a network of anti-government activists led by Ammon Bundy. In Sacramento, California, uniformed Proud Boys [provided security](#) at an antivax rally where city Supervisor Sue Frost participated.

At least one uniformed Proud Boy [attended a rally](#) against the removal of Confederate monuments in Palatka, Florida, held by a right-wing activist who is running in the 2022 primary against Republican Sen. Marco Rubio. Other attendees included a local pastor who was later arrested for his role in Jan. 6, and members of the League of the South, a violent neo-Confederate group.

They've also made a friend in Jo Rae Perkins, a QAnon conspiracist who's running for Senate out of Oregon. At a February rally in Salem that was attended by uniformed Proud Boys, Perkins took the stage and publicly thanked members of the group.

"For those of you who don't know the Proud Boys, they're a great group of men," Perkins said. "They love this country and they love this state. They are there to make sure we don't lose our rights."

And in Sanford, Florida, Tarrio and members of the Proud Boys held a rally outside the federal jail there to demand justice for Jan. 6 defendants, including Florida organizer Joe Biggs (who is being detained pending the outcome of his conspiracy trial). A bunch of "White Lives Matter" activists joined the fray.

### **Where do they go now?**

The Proud Boys were founded in 2016, in the shadow of Trump's ascent to the White House. They almost immediately gained a reputation for hipster racism, misogyny, and brutality, especially in political-violence hotspots like Portland, Oregon. When they occasionally appeared in uniform at MAGA rallies, their presence would receive [heavy scrutiny](#). (*Disclosure: Gavin McInnes was a co-founder of VICE in the mid-1990s. He left the company in 2008 and has had no involvement since then. He founded the Proud Boys in 2016.*)

Since then, they've engaged in bloody brawls at protests and rallies around the country. Despite the mounting pile of evidence, and their own rhetoric, proving them to be a group that prides itself on violence, they've continued to build credibility on the political fringes and in right-wing activist circles. They got a massive boost of legitimacy when, during a presidential debate in 2020, Trump appeared to address the Proud Boys directly, telling them to ["stand back and stand by."](#) Though Trump later tried to walk back his comments, many saw them as a tacit endorsement of the Proud Boys' actions—past and future.

When thousands of angry Trump supporters took to the streets of Washington, D.C., for two large protests in November and December that year, the Proud Boys were there too, moving around the city like a small army as people in MAGA hats [cheered for them](#), shouting things like "We love you, Proud Boys!" When night came, there was bloodshed, and Proud Boys were documented brawling with counterprotesters and police, and [vandalizing historically Black churches](#).

None of that seemed to harm their reputation among the MAGA crowd when Jan. 6 rolled around. The violence at the Capitol that day only helped further establish the Proud Boys as a household name. Dozens of members have since been charged—and some leaders are facing serious conspiracy charges and years in prison.

The idea that they've focused their energies on establishing alliances and legitimacy in right-wing activist circles and themselves as the militant wing of the GOP should be cause for concern, especially in a tense election year where the country is as polarized as it was a year ago.

"Heading into 2022, and as we get closer to the election, we anticipate seeing the Proud Boys return to the street violence that they're so well known for," said Burghart. "Whether it's engaging in the street brawls they're known for, or engaging in more attempts to harass and intimidate voters."

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HEADLINE	01/05 Arrest: attacking vaccination clinic workers
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/01/05/california-vaccination-clinic-attack-apollo/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/01/05/california-vaccination-clinic-attack-apollo/</a>
GIST	<p>A Southern California man was arrested after he recently attacked workers at a coronavirus vaccination clinic, allegedly calling them "murderers" and falsely accusing the staffers of causing the covid pandemic, according to police and clinic officials.</p> <p>Two staff members with Families Together of Orange County were injured in a Dec. 30 attack on the group's mobile clinic in Tustin, Calif., the organization said in a news release Wednesday. Families Together said one of the members "sustained serious injuries and was sent to the hospital in an ambulance" but that both workers "are expected to make a full recovery within a few days."</p>

“We are thankful for our team’s bravery, strength and resilience,” the group wrote. “Despite the violent nature of the assault, Families Together kept offering vaccines and boosters to patients that day and the team was fully back at work the following week.”

Thomas Apollo, 43, entered the clinic maskless last week and accused workers of being “murderers” who are “making people sick” before he started throwing punches at staffers, Parsia Jahanbani, mobile operations manager for Families Together, told the Orange County Register. Jahanbani recounted to the Los Angeles Times that it took multiple people at the clinic to pry Apollo away from a medical assistant he was beating up and that seven police officers were needed to restrain the man over about 15 minutes.

Apollo, of Poway, Calif., was arrested and booked into the Orange County jail Thursday on suspicion of battery and resisting arrest, according to police. He was released on bail Friday, records show.

His case has been forwarded for review to the Orange County District Attorney’s Office, which will decide whether to pursue criminal charges against him, Tustin Police Lt. Matt Nunley told The Washington Post.

Families Together of Orange County CEO Alexander Rossel said in a statement to local media that the organization “will not tolerate any type of violence or threats against our staff, patients or volunteers.” He told The Post that Families Together was “shocked by the attack on our covid vaccine team.”

“We know the case is now in the hands of the District Attorney’s office and we hope it proceeds in enforcing the full extent of the law,” Rossel said in a statement.

Apollo did not respond to a request for comment. It’s unclear whether he has an attorney.

The United States continues to deal with a persistent partisan divide over coronavirus vaccination, even as the highly transmissible omicron variant causes case numbers to surge nationwide. The divide has resulted in the spread of misinformation on vaccines, as well as online and in-person harassment of health-care workers.

The harassment has been met with immediate blowback. Utah tech executive Dave Bateman resigned Tuesday after sending an email hours earlier to state lawmakers and business leaders that was littered with baseless claims and antisemitic tropes about the vaccines.

But as the pandemic approaches its third year in the United States, violence and threats against health-care workers remain a disturbing trend nationwide. In Tennessee, a woman was arrested in May on charges of driving through a vaccination site at high speed and nearly hitting seven workers while yelling, “No vaccine!” Cox Medical Center Branson in Missouri acknowledged in September that violence against its workers had tripled over the past year, prompting the facility to give employees panic buttons. Some Kootenai Health employees in Idaho told administrators they were scared to go to the grocery store if they were still wearing their scrubs, according to the Associated Press.

Families Together of Orange County — which has administered more than 50,000 doses of coronavirus vaccines as of Wednesday, according to the news release — was operating its mobile vaccination clinic last week in the parking lot of its offices in Tustin, about 35 miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles. In addition to vaccines, Families Together also offers medical, dental, vision and wellness services.

After Apollo walked into the clinic without a mask before 10 a.m., workers asked him to put a mask on, according to police. When Apollo refused, he was asked to leave.

“He said, ‘I don’t need a mask, I don’t have the virus, and you are the ones making people sick,’ ” Jahanbani, 37, told the Register. “And just every type of profanity you can imagine.”

Apollo allegedly shouted and clenched his fists as he denounced workers as “murderers” and falsely accused them of facilitating a hoax inside the mobile clinic. Then, Apollo lunged at Jahanbani and a medical assistant, punching the pair multiple times, the workers told the Register.

At one point, Apollo pinned down the medical assistant, who declined to be publicly identified in local media, and landed “a few pretty strong punches” to the official’s head, chest and back, Jahanbani told the Times.

“It was one of my biggest fears coming true,” Jahanbani said.

It took five people to pry Apollo away from the assistant and pin him down until police arrived. When authorities got to the clinic, seven officers were needed to detain Apollo, Nunley said. Apollo was handcuffed to a stretcher and shocked with a stun gun before he was arrested, reported the Register.

“He was shouting, ‘You’re a part of this, too!’ at the officers,” Jahanbani told the outlet.

Families Together said it was “extremely saddened” by the attack but that nothing would stop its workers from administering vaccine doses to people who want them.

“We’re proud of the strength and bravery of our team, and while this incident has shaken us, we will not be deterred from our mission to keep our community safe and healthy,” the group wrote.

Jahanbani told the Register that he was ready to forgive Apollo for the attack — and hopes he understands why vaccination is necessary to help stop the spread of the virus.

“This isn’t a man-made problem,” Jahanbani said. “It’s happening to humanity, and we all have to unite together against it. We all want things to go back to normal, and that’s why we’re doing this.”

Apollo is scheduled to appear in court on Jan. 27.

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HEADLINE	01/05 Back-to-back bomb threats Black colleges
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/05/hbcus-bomb-threats-us-colleges-universities-investigation">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/jan/05/hbcus-bomb-threats-us-colleges-universities-investigation</a>
GIST	<p>At least seven historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) across the United States received back-to-back bomb threats this week, forcing students to evacuate or shelter in place while authorities investigated.</p> <p>The threats come amid a dramatic rise in bombings in the US and follow bomb threats at other US colleges last November.</p> <p>The targeted HBCUs spanned six states and Washington DC, including <a href="#">Prairie View A&amp;M University in Texas</a>, <a href="#">the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff</a>, <a href="#">Howard University</a>, <a href="#">Florida Memorial University</a>, <a href="#">Norfolk State University in Virginia</a>, <a href="#">North Carolina Central University</a>, and <a href="#">Xavier University</a> in New Orleans.</p> <p>Some students and university employees were put on lockdown, while others were forced to relocate off-campus. The schools have since given the all-clear, <a href="#">the Washington Post reported</a>.</p> <p>Whether the barrage of violent threats targeting universities that have historically served Black students was a series of isolated events or part of a larger conspiracy was not immediately clear, <a href="#">the Post reported</a>.</p> <p>While some of the threats were <a href="#">later deemed unfounded</a>, police warned that at least one had been “very real”, according to <a href="#">local New Orleans news channel WDSU</a>. None resulted in explosions.</p>

	<p>The incidents were not the first bomb threats on college campuses this academic year. Last semester, three Ivy League schools – Cornell University, Columbia University and Brown University – all reported similar warnings, <a href="#">none of which were found to be credible</a>.</p> <p>This week’s events also come after an alarming uptick in bombings in the US. In a report on 2020, the United States Bomb Data Center <a href="#">recorded 25% fewer bomb threats than in 2019</a>. Yet it tallied 428 actual bombings – a 71% increase from the year before.</p> <p>Officials from <a href="#">the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff</a> asked <a href="#">everyone to remain vigilant</a>, while police told anyone with relevant information to contact the <a href="#">crime stoppers tip hotline</a>.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Suspect in K9 killing, officer stabbing dead</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/seattle-police-officer-shoots-burglary-suspect-on-beacon-hill/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/seattle-police-officer-shoots-burglary-suspect-on-beacon-hill/</a>
GIST	<p>A Seattle police officer shot and killed a burglary suspect on Beacon Hill on Wednesday afternoon after he fatally stabbed a police dog and stabbed another officer in the face, according to the Seattle Police Department.</p> <p>The department’s K-9 team responded to a report of a man with a machete and knife breaking into a residence on the 2200 block of South Eddy Street shortly after 2 p.m., Assistant Chief Tom Mahaffey said.</p> <p>Upon arrival, he said the team saw the suspect and began a brief pursuit. A few blocks away, an altercation ensued, and the suspect stabbed and killed the police dog and stabbed an officer, Mahaffey said.</p> <p>Another officer arrived and shot the suspect, who died at the scene, he said. The officer who was stabbed in the face was treated on-site by medics, Mahaffey said.</p> <p>The residents of the home were not physically injured according to the initial report, Mahaffey said.</p> <p>SPD said the shooting will be investigated by the Force Investigation Team, adding that representatives of the Office of Police Accountability and the Office of Inspector General also responded to the scene Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>Officers’ body-camera video footage is expected to be released within 72 hours, per department policy.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Two anti-govt. militia members indicted</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/2-men-with-ties-to-central-washington-anti-government-militia-indicted-on-federal-charges/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/2-men-with-ties-to-central-washington-anti-government-militia-indicted-on-federal-charges/</a>
GIST	<p>Two Central Washington men with ties to the “boogaloo” anti-government militia group have been indicted on charges tied to explosive devices allegedly intended for use on law enforcement.</p> <p>Daniel J. Anderson of Kennewick and Connor D. Goodman of Auburn were indicted by a grand jury Tuesday on conspiracy charges to make or possess unregistered explosive devices. Anderson, who has been in custody following a search of his home in mid-December, also was charged with possession of an unregistered destructive device.</p> <p>Court records did not list an attorney or detention status for Goodman on Wednesday.</p> <p>The FBI worked with a confidential informant beginning in June to infiltrate the “Verified Bois” group that discussed stealing explosive materials and committing violence against law enforcement officials, according to court documents.</p>



Anderson, 26, used commercial fireworks to construct homemade explosive devices in glass Mason jars, according to a sworn statement by Special Agent Justin Bodes of the FBI. Goodman is identified as the leader of the group who provided Anderson with a shotgun at a meeting in September.

The FBI also received chat messages in which Anderson called the explosives “distraction devices” that could “throw birdshot at least 20 yards.” The confidential source told police that Anderson listened in to Kennewick Police radio chatter in April, and put on body armor and armed himself when officers responded to his apartment complex on a call of a suicidal neighbor.

In one meeting, the informant captured video evidence of Anderson holding the explosive device. It was seized during the search Dec. 16, according to court records.

The anti-government “boogaloo” movement is made up of a loosely connected network of people who believe the United States is on the brink of a second civil war, according to research by the Washington, D.C.-based security think tank the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

“This idea supports the use of violence against any political side in order to foment increasingly violent reactions and further accelerate the demise of the government,” Bodes wrote in his sworn statement.

Anderson is listed in custody of the Benton County Jail. The charges against him carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. Goodman’s charge carries a maximum five-year penalty.

A hearing in the case is scheduled for Jan. 12.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Google Street View: Italy mafia fugitive</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/05/italian-mafia-fugitive-arrested-in-spain-after-google-maps-sighting">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/05/italian-mafia-fugitive-arrested-in-spain-after-google-maps-sighting</a>
GIST	<p>An Italian mafia boss on the run for 20 years was tracked down to a Spanish town after being spotted on <a href="#">Google Street View</a>.</p> <p>Gioacchino Gammino, a convicted murderer listed among Italy’s most wanted gangsters, was arrested in Galapagar, a town near Madrid, where over the years he had married, changed his name to Manuel, worked as a chef and owned a fruit and vegetable shop.</p> <p>Sicilian police carried out several investigations in their search for Gammino, 61, and a European arrest warrant was issued in 2014. The fugitive was traced to Spain, but it was <a href="#">Google</a> Street View that helped to pinpoint his precise location.</p> <p>The navigation tool, accessible through <a href="#">Google Maps</a>, had captured an image of two men chatting outside a fruit and vegetable shop called El Huerto de Manu, or Manu’s Garden, in Galapagar. Police believed one of the men closely resembled Gammino, but his identity was only confirmed when they came across a listing for a nearby restaurant called La Cocina de Manu or Manu’s Kitchen.</p> <p>The shop and the restaurant are now closed, but the police found a photo of Gammino, dressed in his chef’s garb, on a still-existing Facebook page for La Cocina de Manu. He was recognisable by the scar on the left side of his chin. The restaurant’s menu included a dish called Cena Siciliana or Sicilian dinner.</p> <p>Gammino was arrested on 17 December but the details surrounding his capture did not come to light until they were reported by La Repubblica on Wednesday.</p> <p>The details were confirmed by the Palermo prosecutor Francesco Lo Voi, who led the latest investigation. “It’s not as if we spend our days wading through Google Maps to find fugitives,” he told the Guardian. “There were many previous and long investigations, which led us to <a href="#">Spain</a>. We were on a good path, with Google Maps helping to confirm our investigations.”</p>



After 20 years in hiding, Gammino thought he had managed to sever all his ties with Sicily. Upon his arrest, he reportedly told police: “How did you find me? I haven’t even called my family for 10 years!”

Gammino belonged to a mafia clan in Agrigento, Sicily, which was caught up in a bloody feud with Cosa Nostra, Sicily’s main mafia network, in the 1990s. He was first arrested in 1984, when he was investigated by the anti-mafia judge Giovanni Falcone, who was assassinated by the mafia in a car bomb in 1992.

Gammino was wanted for murder and various other mafia-related crimes. He was arrested for a second time in Barcelona in 1998. He had been serving a life sentence at Rebibbia prison in Rome when, in 2002, he managed to escape during the commotion of the making of a film at the prison.

It is not the first time a mafia fugitive has been caught with the help of the web. In [March last year](#), Mark Feren Claude Biart was captured in the Caribbean after appearing in [YouTube](#) cooking videos. Biart had been on the run since 2014, when Italian prosecutors ordered his arrest for trafficking cocaine in the Netherlands on behalf of the Cacciola clan of the ’Ndrangheta mafia.

Until his arrest, Biart had been leading a quiet life among the Italian expat community in Boca Chica in the Dominican Republic. Although the YouTube videos of him flaunting his cooking skills never showed his face, police said he was betrayed by the distinctive tattoos on his body.

In 2019, police arrested a mobster with the Camorra mafia organisation [while he was eating pasta](#) with his two cats sitting beside him in an apartment in the outskirts of Naples.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 More children dying by gunfire</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/american-children-gun-deaths.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=US%20News">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/american-children-gun-deaths.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=US%20News</a>
GIST	<p>Kendall Munson was so worried about the gun violence in her neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side that she sent her sons to live with their grandparents outside Atlanta. But death found them anyway.</p> <p>On Dec. 9, her goofy, football-loving 11-year-old son, Elyjah, and some friends were walking to a gas station for after-school snacks when one of Elyjah’s best friends, a 12-year-old, pulled a gun from a backpack and shot Elyjah in the head.</p> <p>It was the second time last year that the family had been jolted by gun violence. Two weeks before Elyjah was killed, his 5-year-old cousin, Khalis Eberhart, was fatally shot after a 3-year-old cousin <a href="#">found a gun under a sofa cushion</a>.</p> <p>“It’s easy to get a gun. It’s easy for our kids to get one,” said Elyjah’s mother, Ms. Munson, who believes that her son’s death was not intentional. “When you’re a kid frivolously playing with something you think is a toy, this is what happens.”</p> <p>The number of children and teenagers killed by gunfire has risen sharply during the coronavirus pandemic. Researchers describe the increase as a fatal consequence of rising nationwide homicide rates, untreated traumas of Covid-19 and <a href="#">a surge of pandemic gun-buying</a> that is putting more children into close contact with guns — both as victims and those wielding guns.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the <a href="#">rate of gun deaths</a> of children 14 and younger rose by roughly 50 percent from the end of 2019 to the end of 2020.</p> <p>And it appears the toll grew worse last year. More than 1,500 children and teenagers younger than 18 were killed in homicides and accidental shootings last year, compared with about 1,380 in 2020, according to the <a href="#">Gun Violence Archive</a>, a publicly sourced database that tracks gun deaths in real time ahead of official government counts.</p>

Toddlers are discovering guns under piles of clothes and between couch cushions. Teenagers are obtaining [untraceable ghost guns made from online kits](#). Middle school students are carrying handguns for protection.

While children die of gunfire at [far lower rates](#) than adults, the rise in young lives cut short has raised alarms with police officials and families across the country.

“We keep seeing the same thing over and over again,” said Keith Meadows, the police chief in South Fulton, Ga, where two young children, including Khalis Eberhart, have recently died of accidental shootings. “When the pandemic hit, we just had this big influx of people getting gun permits. People are buying these weapons without getting the right type of education.”

Police departments and cities across the country are struggling to intervene. Larger cities like Philadelphia tormented by rising youth violence are plowing millions into violence-intervention programs, youth leadership groups and community groups. In December, Chief Meadows held a gun safety course that 50 parents attended, some with their children in tow.

A day later, a 3-year-old boy was wounded after he found a gun under a bed and shot himself in the stomach.

Much of the toll is concentrated in a few dozen big cities, with Chicago, Philadelphia, Houston and Milwaukee at the top of the list, according to the Gun Violence Archive.

But few American places go unscathed. In Sedalia, a city of 22,000 in central Missouri, 4-year-old Andre Walker [fatally shot himself](#) at home after finding the loaded family handgun. D’Shaunti Kyanni Hunter, 17, was [found shot to death](#) in a rural Georgia cemetery.

After a gunman killed four teenagers at Oxford High School in Michigan, the local prosecutor [filed involuntary manslaughter charges against the parents](#) of the 15-year-old suspect. The prosecutor accused the teenager’s parents of buying him the handgun as a Christmas present and leaving it available to him in an unlocked bedroom drawer, even as school officials raised alarms about their son’s violent fantasies. The parents have pleaded not guilty.

But for the most part, adult gun owners are not charged when their weapons are involved in shootings that kill children and teenagers, legal experts say. And some families said they were frustrated that the shootings — which disproportionately affect Black and Hispanic children and teenagers in [poorer neighborhoods](#) — did not seem to stir much wider concern.

“It’s like a normal thing,” said Kim Sipes, whose 16-year-old nephew, Ramon Sosa, was shot and killed with his grandmother over the summer in Oklahoma City.

A 16-year-old has been charged in their deaths, reflecting how the number of youths 19 and younger who commit homicides rose by nearly 20 percent between 2019 and 2020, [according to F.B.I. crime data](#).

Ms. Sipes said she wanted Oklahoma legislators to pass laws that would prevent 16-year-olds from gaining access to handguns, but said she had little hope that her nephew and sister’s killings would galvanize them to act. Even a fund-raising website her family set up to cover funeral costs struggled to reach a third of the \$10,000 goal.

Researchers say public health agencies and schools strained by two years of the pandemic are now falling behind in addressing the roots of the current surge in violence affecting children.

“We hoped that as life resumed things would go back to the way they were,” said Sarah Burd-Sharps, senior director of research at Everytown for Gun Safety, a gun control group funded largely by Michael R. Bloomberg, the former New York mayor. “It’s clearly not happening.”

Instead, anti-violence activists say a sense of helplessness and anger has taken root.

“Is it Covid? Is it mental disorders? Are these guns getting into the hands of younger kids?” asked Malissa Thomas-St. Clair, an activist in Columbus, Ohio, who co-founded the group Mothers of Murdered Columbus Children [after a 14-year-old boy shot and killed his 2-year-old nephew](#) last year. “There’s nowhere you can hide.”

A [recent tally](#) from Mike McLively, who directs the Community Violence Initiative at the gun control group Giffords, found that 15 states have pledged nearly \$700 million toward gun-violence prevention. The pandemic interrupted many of these programs, and cities are now scrambling to catch up.

“It is absolutely a crisis,” said Erica Atwood, senior director of Philadelphia’s Office of Policy and Strategic Initiatives for Criminal Justice and Public Safety. More than 30 children and teenagers died in shootings in the Philadelphia area last year, according to the Gun Violence Archive.

In Columbus, Ohio’s booming capital, activists say a rise of chaotic, sometimes inexplicable eruptions of gun violence aimed at children has left neighborhoods reeling and children too frightened to walk home from bus stops.

In 2019, three children 17 and younger were killed by gunfire. That number rose to 20 in 2020 and 17 last year, according to police statistics.

Bereaved families have begun organizing to demand action from the police and community leaders. Mothers march in matching orange T-shirts and wave posters of their slain children. They visited impromptu vigils at murder scenes until one was shot up over the summer.

In Columbus, 2021 began with the murder of two young children. Late on New Year’s Day of last year, Ava Williams, 9, and her sister, Alyse, 6, were shot and killed by their father, who had spent the pandemic in and out of work and hoarding guns.

“I was worried about Covid,” said Vanecia Kirkland, the girls’ mother, who described her daughters as loving and inseparable sisters. “I should have been worried about their father.”

Then in early December came the grim news that another pair of children had been killed.

Demetrius Wall’Neal, a football-loving 9-year-old, and his 6-year-old sister, Londynn, who never left home without a favorite sparkly purse, were climbing into a car with their mother’s boyfriend when gunmen walked up and sprayed the car with bullets, killing all three.

“How could you kill two babies?” their grandmother Jessica Jones wondered as she sat inside a bakery one morning in the Columbus suburb where Demetrius had played football. “I just don’t understand. When does it end?”

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HEADLINE	01/05 Rabbi wounded in attack jailed for fraud
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/rabbi-yisroel-goldstein-fraud.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/rabbi-yisroel-goldstein-fraud.html</a>
GIST	A rabbi who was shot and wounded during a deadly attack on his synagogue north of San Diego in 2019 was sentenced on Tuesday to 14 months in prison for engaging in yearslong, multimillion-dollar fraud schemes, prosecutors said.

The sentence handed down by Judge Cynthia A. Bashant of U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California exceeded the recommendations of federal prosecutors and the rabbi's lawyers, both of whom had recommended home confinement.

The rabbi, Yisroel Goldstein, 60, the former director of the Chabad of Poway, was also ordered to pay \$2,834,608 in restitution for the schemes, which involved phony contributions to the Chabad and affiliated charities and through which he personally received more than \$500,000, prosecutors said.

"You dragged down so many congregants," Judge Bashant said in imposing the sentence, according to [a statement](#) from the Justice Department.

"I think time in custody is important," she said. "It's important to send a message to the community, and it's important to send a message to you."

Rabbi Goldstein's lawyers did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Wednesday. In court papers recommending that he be sentenced to four months of home detention, they said that he had accepted responsibility for his actions by laying out the details of his schemes in a guilty plea and had cooperated with the authorities.

"I have let myself down and everything I have been taught, and everything that I have preached for 40 years, and allowed myself to be seduced to a very dark place, allowing the power of money to get the better part of my soul," Rabbi Goldstein wrote in a letter to the judge.

He asked the judge to "accept my repentance for the damages and severe disappointment that I have caused."

"I often wonder why I survived the shooting," he wrote. "The universe must have faith in a better future for me, to become a better person and to make whole for my past sins and transgressions."

Rabbi Goldstein had emerged as a prominent voice of resilience and determination after a gunman who was yelling antisemitic slurs [attacked the Chabad of Poway](#), in Poway, Calif., killing a woman and injuring three other people on April 27, 2019, during the Jewish holiday of Passover.

Rabbi Goldstein, who was already under investigation in connection with the fraud schemes at the time of the attack, was shot in both hands and lost an index finger. In the days after, he [condemned antisemitism at the United Nations](#) and spoke at a [National Day of Prayer event](#) at the White House with President Donald J. Trump.

"I guarantee you, we will not be intimidated or deterred by terror," [he said after the shooting](#). "Terror will not win."

In September, the man who carried out the attack, John T. Earnest of San Diego, was [sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole](#) in a deal that spared him the death penalty. Mr. Earnest, who had expressed a desire to kill Jews and Muslims, had also pleaded guilty to setting fire to a mosque.

Rabbi Goldstein established the Chabad of Poway in 1986 and had served as its director and head rabbi until 2018, prosecutors said.

He began cooperating with the authorities shortly after federal agents executed search warrants at his home in October 2018, and he worked undercover for the government, his lawyers said in court papers.

In July 2020, Rabbi Goldstein and five associates [pleaded guilty](#) to their roles in the schemes, which was intended to defraud the Internal Revenue Service, several Fortune 500 companies, and several public and private agencies.

Prosecutors said that in his plea agreement, Rabbi Goldstein had acknowledged that, while he was director of the synagogue, he had received at least \$6.2 million in phony contributions to the Chabad and affiliated charities and had secretly refunded up to 90 percent of the donations to the bogus donors.

After he provided the donors with fake receipts, they claimed illegal tax deductions, and Rabbi Goldstein kept about 10 percent for himself, prosecutors said.

Rabbi Goldstein acknowledged that he had also defrauded three companies by “tricking them into matching supposed charitable donations of their employees,” prosecutors said in a statement.

In court papers, prosecutors recommended that Rabbi Goldstein be sentenced to eight months of home detention. They said the attack on the synagogue was “a driving factor behind the extraordinary departure and sentencing recommendation of the United States.”

“Following the shooting, Rabbi Goldstein repeatedly spoke out about the attack, and was the face of the community both locally and nationally, despite his injury and PTSD,” prosecutors wrote in court papers.

In a statement on Tuesday, Randy Grossman, the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of California, said that the sentence handed down by Judge Bashant “accounts for these extraordinary circumstances and our office’s mission to always seek justice.”

“Yisroel Goldstein exploited his position and stature as a faith leader to commit well-planned and carefully executed crimes of greed,” Mr. Grossman said.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Federal prisons director resigns</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/politics/michael-carvajal-resigns-prisons.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/politics/michael-carvajal-resigns-prisons.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The head of the Federal Bureau of Prisons plans to resign as the agency struggles with issues that have overshadowed his tenure, including employee misconduct, understaffing and violence.</p> <p>The director, Michael Carvajal, <a href="#">was appointed in February 2020</a> and will step down once a successor is in place.</p> <p>Anthony Coley, a Justice Department spokesman, said on Wednesday that Mr. Carvajal’s “operational experience and intimate knowledge of the Bureau of Prisons — the department’s largest component — helped steer it during critical times, including during this historic pandemic.”</p> <p>Mr. Carvajal, who began his career in the bureau 30 years ago as a federal corrections officer, took over the agency just as the coronavirus began <a href="#">to sweep through the nation’s prisons</a>. As <a href="#">hundreds of thousands</a> of inmates and correctional officers became infected, Mr. Carvajal’s policies drew criticism from lawmakers in both parties.</p> <p>His tenure continued to be marked by crises, including a string of inmate deaths, escapes and chronic understaffing.</p> <p>After The Associated Press <a href="#">reported last month</a> that more than 100 employees at the Bureau of Prisons had been arrested, convicted of or sentenced for crimes in the past three years alone, Senator Richard J. Durbin, Democrat of Illinois and chairman of the Judiciary Committee, called for Mr. Carvajal to step down.</p> <p>“His resignation is an opportunity for new, reform-minded leadership at the Bureau of Prisons,” Mr. Durbin said in a statement on Wednesday.</p> <p>Mr. Carvajal submitted his resignation to Attorney General Merrick B. Garland.</p>

HEADLINE	01/05 Maxwell verdict under cloud; mistrial?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/nyregion/maxwell-trial-jury-inquiry.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/nyregion/maxwell-trial-jury-inquiry.html</a>
GIST	<p>Federal prosecutors on Wednesday asked the judge who oversaw <a href="#">Ghislaine Maxwell</a>'s sex-trafficking trial to investigate the process by which one of the jurors was chosen, after he told news outlets he was a sexual abuse victim and had discussed his experience during deliberations.</p> <p>The prosecutors' request, in a letter filed with the court, raised the possibility of additional inquiry into how jurors who voted to convict Ms. Maxwell had been selected and the prospect of Ms. Maxwell's lawyers moving to have a mistrial declared in <a href="#">the closely watched case</a>.</p> <p>Later on Wednesday, Ms. Maxwell's lawyers indicated they planned to do just that, saying in two letters to the judge that their client would seek a new trial and that the judge "can and should order" one without holding a hearing, as the government had requested.</p> <p>Ms. Maxwell's lawyers said Ms. Maxwell planned to make her request under a federal rule that grants a judge the power to grant a new trial when the "interest of justice so requires."</p> <p>The dueling requests, and the disclosure that prompted them, threatened to cloud the conviction of Ms. Maxwell, who was found guilty last month of <a href="#">five counts</a> related to what prosecutors said was her role in procuring teenage girls for the disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein to sexually abuse.</p> <p>In another potential complication, a second juror described in an interview with The New York Times having been sexually abused as a child. This juror, who requested anonymity, said that they, too, had discussed the experience during deliberations and that the revelation had appeared to help shape the jury's discussions.</p> <p>The two jurors' disclosures could be particularly problematic if they failed to note their experiences to the court during jury selection. All the potential jurors in the case were asked in a confidential questionnaire whether they or any relatives or friends had been the victim of sexual abuse or harassment.</p> <p>The juror who was interviewed by the other news outlets, including <a href="#">The Independent</a> and <a href="#">Reuters</a>, could not immediately be reached for comment on Wednesday.</p> <p>Lawyers for Ms. Maxwell did not immediately respond to requests for comment. A spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office for the Southern District of New York declined to comment.</p> <p>In their letter, federal prosecutors asked the judge in the case, <a href="#">Alison J. Nathan</a>, to schedule a hearing on the matter in about a month, adding that "any juror investigation should be conducted exclusively under the supervision of the court."</p> <p>Early Wednesday evening, Judge Nathan set a schedule for motions on Ms. Maxwell's bid for a new trial, giving the defense until Jan. 19 to file a motion and setting Feb. 2 as the government's deadline for responding.</p> <p>"The parties' briefing should address whether an inquiry of some kind is permitted and/or required, and if so, the nature of such an inquiry," the judge wrote. She also granted the government's request to offer court-appointed legal counsel to the juror whose statements prompted the flurry of post-trial activity.</p> <p>One immediate question in an inquiry would most likely be how the two jurors responded to the questionnaires, sent to hundreds of prospective jurors in the weeks before the trial, in Federal District Court in Manhattan.</p> <p>The form included questions on a range of topics, including whether prospective jurors or members of their families had experienced sexual abuse. The prospective jurors' responses remain under seal.</p>



The juror who was interviewed by the other news outlets told Reuters he “flew through” the initial questionnaire and did not recall being asked about his personal experiences with sexual abuse. He said he would have answered such questions honestly, Reuters reported.

He and the second juror both made it to the next round of jury selection, appearing in court in November. There, in a process known as voir dire, Judge Nathan, drawing on their questionnaire answers, asked them several follow-up questions. Neither was asked in that setting whether they had been sexually abused, nor did they say that they had been.

Judge Nathan’s questioning of several prospective jurors, including some who wound up on the panel, indicated that they had answered “yes” to a question about whether they or a loved one had ever been the victim of a crime.

Ms. Maxwell’s lawyers said in one of their letters to Judge Nathan on Wednesday that if she decided to hold a hearing in the matter, it should be happen in less than a month. They also suggested that all 12 jurors who took part in the deliberations and verdict be questioned.

At trial, prosecutors presented two dozen witnesses and other evidence showing that Ms. Maxwell, 60, the daughter of a British media mogul, helped Mr. Epstein recruit, groom and sexually abuse underage girls. He was found [dead in a Manhattan jail](#) in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex-trafficking charges; the medical examiner ruled that Mr. Epstein had hanged himself.

The jury acquitted Ms. Maxwell of one count of enticing a minor to travel across state lines to engage in an illegal sexual act. A sentencing date has not been set.

Former federal prosecutors and legal experts said on Wednesday that the jurors’ disclosures could undermine the verdict, especially if it is shown that they did not answer the jury questionnaires or voir dire honestly.

Arlo Devlin-Brown, a former federal prosecutor who once ran the Southern District’s public-corruption unit, said, “Generally there is nothing wrong with jurors bringing their personal experiences into deliberations,” so long as they follow the judge’s instructions.

“However,” he added, “dishonesty during the selection process goes to the very integrity of the proceedings and credible allegations of such are taken very seriously.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/05 Arrest: stealing unpublished manuscripts</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/books/publishing-manuscripts-phishing-scam-filippo-bernardini.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/books/publishing-manuscripts-phishing-scam-filippo-bernardini.html</a>
GIST	<p>They were perplexing thefts, lacking a clear motive or payoff, and they happened in the genteel, not particularly lucrative world of publishing: Someone was <a href="#">stealing unpublished book manuscripts</a>.</p> <p>The thefts and attempted thefts occurred primarily over email, by a fraudster impersonating publishing professionals and targeting authors, editors, agents and literary scouts who might have drafts of novels and other books.</p> <p>The mystery may now be solved. On Wednesday, the Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested Filippo Bernardini, a 29-year-old rights coordinator for Simon &amp; Schuster UK, saying that he “impersonated, defrauded, and attempted to defraud, hundreds of individuals” over five or more years, obtaining hundreds of unpublished manuscripts in the process.</p> <p>Mr. Bernardini, who was arrested after landing at John F. Kennedy International Airport, was charged with wire fraud and aggravated identity theft in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. A spokesman for the Southern District said Mr. Bernardini did not yet have a lawyer.</p>



A Simon & Schuster spokesman, in a statement, said the publisher was “shocked and horrified” by the allegations Mr. Bernardini faces and that he has been suspended until there is further information on the case.

“The safekeeping of our authors’ intellectual property is of primary importance to Simon & Schuster, and for all in the publishing industry, and we are grateful to the FBI for investigating these incidents and bringing charges against the alleged perpetrator,” he added. Simon & Schuster was not accused of wrongdoing in the indictment.

According to the indictment, to get his hands on the manuscripts, Mr. Bernardini would send out emails impersonating real people working in the publishing industry — a specific editor, for example — by using fake email addresses. He would employ slightly tweaked domain names like penguinrandomhouse.com instead of penguinrandomhouse.com, — putting an “rn” in place of an “m.” The indictment said he had registered more than 160 fraudulent internet domains that impersonated publishing professionals and companies.

Mr. Bernardini also targeted a New York City-based literary scouting company. He set up impostor login pages that prompted his victims to enter their usernames and passwords, which gave him broad access to the scouting company’s database.

Mr. Bernardini left few digital crumbs online, omitting his last name on his social media accounts, like Twitter and LinkedIn, where he described an “obsession for the written word and languages.” According to his LinkedIn profile, he obtained his bachelor’s in Chinese language from Università Cattolica in Milan, and later served as the Italian translator for the Chinese comic book author Rao Pingru’s memoir, “Our Story.” He also obtained a master’s degree in publishing from University College London and described his passion as ensuring “books can be read and enjoyed all over the world and in multiple languages.”

Many in publishing who received the phishing emails noted that whoever wrote them was clearly familiar with the industry. The thief would sometimes use common shorthand, like “ms” for manuscript, and understood how a book got from one point to the next on its way to publication. The phishing attacks have been so voluminous and far-reaching, hitting publishing professionals in the United States, Sweden and Taiwan, among other countries, that some have said it could not possibly be the work of just one person.

For years, the scheme has baffled people in the book world. Works by high-profile writers and celebrities like Margaret Atwood and Ethan Hawke have been targeted, but so have story collections and works by first-time authors. When manuscripts were successfully stolen, none of them seemed to show up on the black market or the dark web. Ransom demands never materialized. Indeed, the indictment details how Mr. Bernardini went about the scheme, but not why.

Early knowledge in a rights department could be an advantage for an employee trying to prove his worth. Publishers compete and bid to publish work abroad, for example, and knowing what’s coming, who is buying what and how much they’re paying could give companies an edge.

“What he’s been stealing,” said Kelly Farber, a literary scout, “is basically a huge amount of information that any publisher anywhere would be able to use to their advantage.”

In a news release announcing the arrest, U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said: “This real-life storyline now reads as a cautionary tale, with the plot twist of Bernardini facing federal criminal charges for his misdeeds.”

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HEADLINE	01/05 AG vows pursue Jan. 6 inquiry ‘at any level’
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/politics/merrick-garland-jan-6-investigation.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/05/us/politics/merrick-garland-jan-6-investigation.html</a>
GIST	WASHINGTON — Facing criticism from Democrats and a few Republicans to hold former President Donald J. Trump accountable for his role in inspiring the riot at the Capitol, Attorney General Merrick B.

Garland vowed on Wednesday that the Justice Department would pursue wrongdoing “at any level,” saying he would defend democratic institutions from attack and threats of violence.

“The Justice Department remains committed to holding all Jan. 6 perpetrators, at any level, accountable under law — whether they were present that day or were otherwise criminally responsible for the assault on our democracy,” Mr. Garland [said in a speech](#) to commemorate the anniversary of the riot, when Mr. Trump’s supporters ransacked the Capitol in a bid to stop the certification of Joseph R. Biden Jr.’s election victory.

The remarks, delivered at the department’s headquarters, come as Mr. Garland is under pressure from Democrats to more aggressively investigate any role that Mr. Trump and his allies may have played in encouraging the violence.

The attorney general also obliquely addressed critics who have urged him to disclose more about the department’s inquiry, including whether investigators are scrutinizing Mr. Trump.

Mr. Garland reiterated that the department would not share details about its findings even as investigators have issued 5,000 subpoenas and search warrants, inspected over 20,000 hours of video footage and sifted through an estimated 15 terabytes of data. “I understand that this may not be the answer some are looking for,” he said. “But we will and we must speak through our work. Anything else jeopardizes the viability of our investigations and the civil liberties of our citizens.”

While the House select committee investigating the Jan. 6 attack has signaled an openness to making a criminal referral to the department if it comes across evidence that Mr. Trump or others broke the law, Mr. Garland did not mention Mr. Trump or any specific investigation the department might be pursuing.

Mr. Garland has never given any substantive public indication of whether or how aggressively the department might be building a case against Mr. Trump or his advisers, and it is not clear what charges they could be subject to.

Some Democrats have openly pushed Mr. Garland to make clear that he intends to act.

Last month, former Senator Claire McCaskill, Democrat of Missouri, said Mr. Garland would either “rise to the occasion or go down in infamy as one of the worst attorney generals in this country’s history” if he did not prosecute Mr. Trump for actions he took before and during the attack.

Department officials have pointed out that the agency’s Jan. 6 inquiry, among the largest investigations in its history, has already produced results. It has led to more than 700 arrests, and more than 275 people have been charged with obstructing Congress’s duty to certify the election results. The F.B.I. asked the public on Wednesday for help in identifying hundreds of additional suspects, and the government estimates that as many as 2,500 people could face federal charges.

Addressing criticism that many guilty pleas obtained by the department have been for misdemeanors, which come with little jail time, Mr. Garland said complex cases often first yielded charges that were “often less severe than later charged offenses” because investigators needed time to collect and examine more evidence.

Mr. Garland also connected the investigation to broader efforts by the department to prosecute threats of political violence and fight voting restrictions, pledging to “protect the cornerstone of our democracy: the right to every eligible citizen to cast a vote that counts.”

He added, “In a democracy, people must not employ violence or unlawful threats of violence to affect that outcome.”

And hanging over the investigation is the question of whether and how the Justice Department would build criminal cases against Mr. Trump, his top allies in Congress and former administration officials who

worked to publicly undermine the results of the election and prevent Mr. Biden from taking office. Those include [Mark Meadows](#), the former White House chief of staff, and [Jeffrey Clark](#), a former Justice Department official.

Mr. Trump and his inner circle made specious claims that the election was fraudulent, even after administration officials said Mr. Trump had lost. They pushed state and federal officials to falsely insist that they had found fraud, and they worked with lawyers to try to invalidate the Electoral College results in key swing states. And, when all else failed, they asked Mr. Trump's supporters to come to Washington on Jan. 6 to "stop the steal."

Legal experts have suggested that such acts could have violated federal voting laws or prohibitions against obstructing Congress from performing its official duties.

Mr. Trump's critics have accused him of encouraging his supporters to use force to intimidate those who would not challenge the Electoral College results, including former Vice President Mike Pence.

But as federal prosecutors weigh the possibility of a case against Mr. Trump or his allies, they would need evidence strong enough to move through the federal courts. Given that Congress has impeached, but never removed, three presidents, the idea that such politically charged cases would sail through a system that has a higher bar for conviction is very unlikely.

"If a case is on the bubble and can't hold up to district court, an appeal and Supreme Court scrutiny, the department will need to use prosecutorial discretion," said Norman Eisen, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who worked as counsel to House Democrats during Mr. Trump's first impeachment over whether he had improperly pressured the president of Ukraine to falsely say he was investigating Mr. Biden.

Given the largely public nature of the acts committed by Mr. Trump, and the lies he continues to peddle since leaving office, Mr. Garland risks fostering the idea that presidents and their allies cannot be held accountable for behavior that undermines democracy, should the Justice Department be unable to publicly respond, experts said.

"You don't want a president and administration — current or former — to be viewed as above the law by the people," said Barbara Perry, a presidential historian at the University of Virginia's Miller Center. "Politics will have trumped the law."

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HEADLINE	01/05 Father missing 7yr-old girl 2yrs arrested
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/father-missing-year-girl-years-ago-arrested-connection/story?id=82096399">https://abcnews.go.com/US/father-missing-year-girl-years-ago-arrested-connection/story?id=82096399</a>
GIST	<p>The father of a missing New Hampshire girl who was last seen over two years ago has been arrested in connection to the case, police said.</p> <p>The Manchester Police Department first reached out to the public for tips on the whereabouts of 7-year-old Harmony Montgomery last week, after it learned she had not been seen since late 2019.</p> <p>Adam Montgomery, 31, was arrested Tuesday on charges including felony second-degree assault "arising from 2019 conduct against Harmony Montgomery," police said.</p> <p>Montgomery also was charged with interference with custody and two charges of endangering the welfare of a child, both misdemeanors. Montgomery has legal custody of Harmony but has not had her in his physical custody since approximately November 2019, according to the complaint.</p> <p>Montgomery waived his right to an arraignment hearing at the Hillsborough Superior Court Wednesday and agreed to be placed in preventive detention, according to court records. ABC News reached out to his attorney for comment.</p>

According to an affidavit released Wednesday, family members told police they were concerned Montgomery was putting Harmony in physical harm. Montgomery allegedly told his brother that he gave Harmony a black eye and "bashed her around his house," the affidavit stated. The brother notified the state's Division of Children, Youth and Families about the injury after he saw Harmony with a black eye in July 2019, according to the affidavit.

Harmony's mother told authorities she believes she last saw her daughter around Easter 2019 in a FaceTime video call, during which the girl "seemed frightened," according to the affidavit.

Her mother lost custody of Harmony in July 2018 in part due to a substance abuse issue and has since regained sobriety, according to the affidavit. She contacted Manchester police in November after she was repeatedly unable to find Harmony or her father, the affidavit said. The department launched an investigation after the state's Division of Children, Youth and Families notified police on Dec. 27 that the agency had been unable to find Harmony, according to the affidavit.

Police interviewed several family members to try to determine the last time Harmony was last seen. Montgomery's current wife told police she last saw the girl in November or December 2019 with her father, who allegedly told her he was driving Harmony to her mother's in Massachusetts, according to the affidavit. His wife "never saw, or heard about [Harmony] after that day," and last saw Montgomery in October, the affidavit stated.

Police located Montgomery sleeping in a car in Manchester on Dec. 31, at which point he "made some contradictory comments during our interaction which raised our suspicion and concern for [Harmony's] well-being," the affidavit stated. Montgomery allegedly told police he had seen Harmony "somewhat recently," then said he hadn't seen her since her mother picked her up in Manchester in November 2019, according to the affidavit.

His girlfriend, who was with him at the time, told police she did not know where Harmony was, according to the affidavit.

The search for Harmony continues, as police are urging anyone with information to contact its dedicated tip line. Manchester Chief Allen Aldenberg told reporters Monday police are assuming she is "alive and well somewhere," and that he hasn't seen anything to suggest otherwise yet.

"This is not a recovery," Aldenberg said during a press briefing. "All efforts are focused on that Harmony is alive, and we are going to do everything we can to find her in that condition."

Part of the investigation will involve determining why it took over two years for Harmony to be reported missing, he said.

"I want to focus on locating her now and dedicating all of our efforts to that," the chief said. "If there was some flaw in the system, I'm not saying there was, but if there was, where was it and how's it going to be addressed?"

Harmony was reunited with her father after spending time in foster care in Massachusetts, ABC Manchester affiliate WMUR reported, citing a source close to the child. New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth and Families officials told WMUR that contact with the family is gradually reduced after reunification.

"It's difficult to account for what happened when we are not engaged with the family," Joe Ribsam, the agency's director, told WMUR. "What's important to figure out right now is what has been happening with this young girl for the past few years."

A reward for information leading to Harmony has reached \$43,000.

	"More than two years have passed since Harmony was last seen," Aldenberg said. "That puts us at a disadvantage, and the public's help is greatly needed."
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HEADLINE	<b>01/04 Sweden: mom charged with war crimes</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-01-04/sweden-charges-woman-for-enlisting-son-12-to-fight-in-syria">https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-01-04/sweden-charges-woman-for-enlisting-son-12-to-fight-in-syria</a>
GIST	<p>STOCKHOLM (Reuters) - A Swedish woman has been charged with war crimes for helping enlist her 12-year-old son to fight as a child soldier in Syria, where he was killed in the civil war, prosecutors said on Tuesday.</p> <p>The 49-year-old woman, a Swedish citizen who returned from Syria in 2020, is the first person known to have been charged in Sweden with aiding the recruitment of her own minor son as a child soldier.</p> <p>The boy, born in 2001, fought beginning in 2013 for groups which include Islamic State. He died in 2017. Authorities released no further identifying details about the mother or her child.</p> <p>The woman denies the charge, her lawyer, Mikael Westerlund, said. If found guilty she faces a minimum prison sentence of four years, prosecutor Reena Devgun said.</p> <p>According to the United Nations, recruiting and using children under the age of 15 as soldiers is prohibited under international humanitarian law and recognised as a war crime by the International Criminal Court.</p> <p>Under Swedish law, courts can try people for crimes against international law committed abroad. The trial will start on Monday, Jan. 10.</p>
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